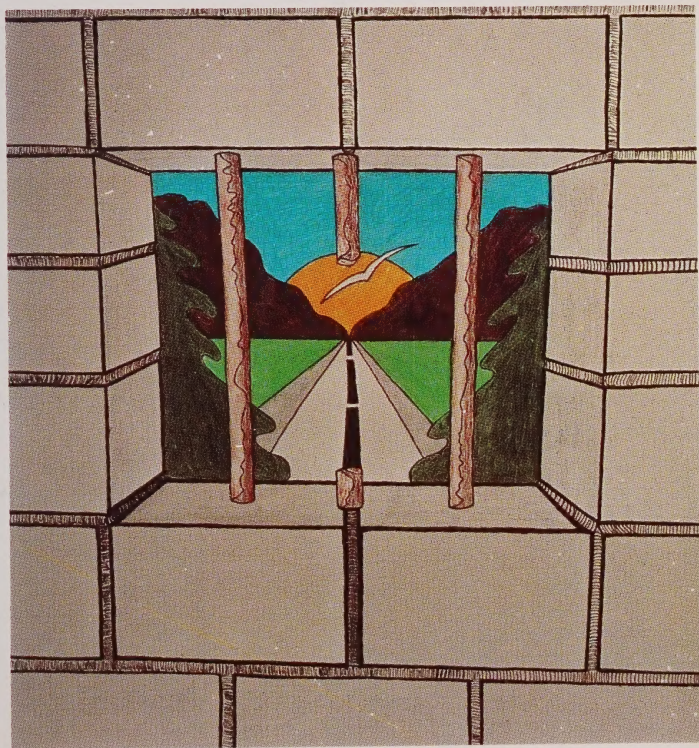

PRISON JOURNAL №5

December 1985





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PRISON JOURNAL No 5

December 1985

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Articles, stories, poems, interviews and reviews in this issue are by prisoners and staff of the SFU Programs, and others interested in writing and prisons. Contributions are welcomed and should be addressed to:

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Financial contributions are also welcomed. If you would like to be on our mailing list, please send \$7.50 to the above address which will pay for issue #4, #5 and #6. Issues #1, #2, and #3 are still available. Single issues are \$4.00

This issue of the *Prison Journal* is published jointly by the Institute for the Humanities and the Prison Education Program at Simon Fraser University.

The Institute for the Humanities at SFU is a teaching and research program devoted to the exploration and dissemination of traditional and modern approaches to the study of the Humanities. It is dedicated to seeking out those critical perspectives that join social concerns with the cultural and historical legacy of the Humanities.

The Prison Education Program at SFU oversees the administration of post-secondary education programs in four Federal prisons in British Columbia and carries on an active research and community affairs program. The SFU Programs at Kent, Matsqui, Mountain and William Head Institutions offer courses in the Liberal Arts leading to degree completion in several academic disciplines. As well, the Program sponsors courses and workshops in Writing and the Fine and Performing Arts.

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Prison Journal Ethos

Prison, like so many other of our social institutions, is a microcosm of society at large. We believe, no doubt in part because we are forced or have chosen to live and work within its boundaries, that it is a most potent and revealing one; and hence springs our desire to use **Prison Journal** to explore the world of imprisonment and to attempt to understand the psychological, social and political relations which lead to its impasse.

The language of prison — lock and key, gate and pass, penitence and punishment, release, parole, inmate, rehabilitation — strain at the limits of metaphor and euphemism, just as the reality of prison pushes against the walls of society's often too easy compartmentalizing of normality and deviance, legality and criminality. To put the case bluntly, the prison is a symbol of our collective failure as a society: where better to look than into the complexities of this dark sign for some clarity on our shared plight?

Prison Journal has three aims: to provide an arena for the captive voices of those who are imprisoned, to be a spotlight of raw illumination on their condition, and to offer a forum to all those concerned with carrying out a serious examination of the phenomenon of the prison. **Prison Journal** is edited by prisoners of the Pacific Region in the Canadian Federal Penitentiary System and by the coordinators of Simon Fraser University's Prison Education Program. We invite contributions from prisoners everywhere.

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Jail

The sea
surges in
like a mass of revolutionaries
To pound
the eroding cliffs
with its demands.

Roy Lowther
(dead in jail, Matsqui, 1985)

Editorial: Prison Voices

Among other things, prison is a place for burying away offenders against, and/or victims of, society's laws, moral codes and power alignments. By and large, most citizens are content with this arrangement and only wish, for the more thoroughgoing protection of their complacency, that the whole business be managed, like a cheap funeral, as discreetly as possible. We, the editors of and contributors to **Prison Journal**, are lacking somewhat in both naivete and discretion; that is, not believing that all that many will join us in this wake, we are intent on holding it anyway.

And, in a strange way, this collection of prison writings is a celebration. The fact that those incarcerated go on thinking, arguing, imagining, criticizing, judging, complaining, dreaming, screaming, being ironical, funny and angry, and that they wish to express themselves in a public forum such as this, does testify to the ongoing vitality of life after sentencing.

Given that our governing intention in compiling this issue of **Prison Journal** was to depend more fully than formerly on the voices of prisoners themselves, we could perhaps do no better now than to let them speak for themselves, but the editorial voice will not be silenced without a few comments. We wanted **Prison Journal #5** to cleave more closely to the reality of prison than the previous four. The dominant preoccupation of this issue is with an examination of the day to day facts of doing time, and it is with this in mind that we have given central place to four interviews with lifers whose experience gives them some authority to talk of these things. We trust that this explanation of our editorial direction will solace those whose contributions have been excluded. Our decision to include a few pieces whose vision goes beyond this focus requires, we feel, no justification.

We toyed with the idea of a list of contributors, but had nothing appropriately glib or pretentious to fill it up with. Interested readers might note, however, that prisoners are permitted to receive mail.

Tom Grieve

Timeburn

All prisoners' faces take on an aspect from time to time that expresses the naked dawn shriek that is the lives of men.

In summer, daylight lingered long enough that in the evening the prisoners could roam the open yards with their frontiers of chainlink and razor wire. By the end of November, the descent of dusk at four o'clock hobbled this universe. The yards closed just before sundown, so deep winter constricted the prisoners' cosmos to the three floored building where they slept, a covered walkway, the dining area and a workplace. Though the prison was only twenty years old, the maybe hundred yards of walkway from the sleeping quarters to the dining area and the hundred yards beyond that led to the workplace was imbued with a kind of antiquity: it was ancient with the numberless steps of thousands of men serving tens of thousands of years.

To get to the workplace the prisoners had to pass a checkpoint. In the arcana of the prison's nomenclature this was called the M-9 gate. On weekdays after lunch it opened at twelve thirty. The guards who manned the gate permitted no passage before this time, although as with all prison rules, imprecision was the only constant. Some days prisoners passed through the gate early, and some days, for no discernible reason, the workplace closed and they did not pass at all.

Jim knew it was close to the appointed hour as he approached the gate. As it was unlocked, he opened it and passed through. From the guard's booth a squat red-faced man emerged and moved briskly to meet him. The guard wore his peaked hat low on his forehead and in his eye the taper of humanity guttered in the wind of monolithic regulation.

"Get back. No passage til twelve thirty."

Newly acquired instinct turned Jim around and pushed him obediently back through the gate. He closed the gate behind himself and swung around to face the guard.

"What time is it now?"

The guard's eyes focused and unfocused, then braked to a halt on the bridge of Jim's nose. Biting down, the guard seemed to consider fleetingly the logistics of turning his watch hand up towards his face.

His gaze shifted and met Jim's directly. Then, as carefully placed as a prizefighter's right cross he said, "Time you got a watch, isn't it?"

Jim felt the skin twitch on his left cheek. Possibly he hoped to turn the verbal sortie back or perhaps the meanness of someone who literally withholds the time of day stunned him. Stupidly, he attempted levity: "If you paid us better around here, maybe I could afford a watch."

"Get paid far too much as it is. Up to me you'd get paid a lot less."

The guard's intent was now undeniable. Curses bubbled hot into Jim's mouth and rage grabbed at his throat. He choked back his anger and the profanity. He paced and seethed. And waited: a couple of minutes later, at twelve-thirty, the gate opened.

For the better part of an hour rage consumed him, biting at him hard, then subsided to a dull gnawing. Despite his efforts to instruct himself, it wheedled and nagged at him, jumping up at him throughout the afternoon and into the evening. The word "endure" came to him and he leapt on it and made it his own.

He began to understand the aspect of the prisoners that expressed that dawn shriek. He knew what started the physical process that settled that look upon their faces: stuttering rage, that once expressed would mean extinction.

Later, when it began to seep back into him, he felt an unusual elasticity in his cheeks and around his mouth. He grinned, vaguely aware of what was happening to him. It didn't feel anything like a grin. Then the skin began to settle and become fast. He shaved blind in the shower the next morning, afraid to look in the mirror.

John Wilcox, William Head Prison

Razor-wire, Millhaven Penitentiary

It slices through my heart
the way it surrounds you,
and something the colour of blood
spills out.

In so much blackness the heart
leaps, jumps a beat by the wall and
then goes over.

You've slashed your hands on the wind,
your eyes on a woman's body,
but nothing, not even the stars going out,
has hurt as much as this.

The heart is a gash and
the sky glitters, but all that
high wire coiled and ready to cut
can't keep tenderness out.

The distance between us
is the thickness of blood. Love
jumps away, jumps
out of us.

Susan Musgrave

Frieda's Garden

The headlights speared a green highway illuminating the words RHYOLITE EXIT 3 MILES and, like noticing a string tied to a finger, it snapped me out of my reverie. Denny noticed, too.

"You been looking like you lost your puppy-dog for the last fifty miles, Bobby. You all right?" He was driving and looking for conversation. I ignored him and reached for a cigarette; I wasn't driving and I wasn't looking for conversation. It was late at night, the end of a long trip, I was tired and we were headed home. We had been moving hard and fast since leaving the coast yesterday morning. GAS 'N GO pit stops only. The floor of the car was ankle-deep in Twinkie wrappers, potato chip bags and empty coffee containers. We were nine days on the road. Travelled California, north to south, robbing four banks in seven days — we didn't stop to count the money or the weekends — and crossed the state line near Truckee yesterday afternoon. We were in the middle of Nevada, George Jones was crying on the radio, and the guns 'n money were in a suitcase. The suitcase was in the trunk and California was already beginning to feel like a long time ago.

Denny barrelled right past the exit to Rhyolite, not looking or slowing down. I could see the town lights off in the distance, sparkling in the hills — the closest Rhyolite ever came to comparing itself to jewels. The population was 183. Half of it must still be awake, wondering why it was there.

What I didn't tell Denny was that I had been brooding over Billy. Since the outskirts of Reno. Billy was our partner from the days when we were all young and this cops 'n robbers stuff was still adventuresome and fun. We hadn't seen him in over eight years. In the meantime we all somehow managed to turn thirty and found that the adventure had skipped town with our youth. These days the cops had lost their sense of humour and the robbing was just a lot of hard work and bad risks.

Last time I laid eyes on Billy I was looking out the wrong side of a jail window near Montreal. He paid me a goodbye visit. Separated by the glass and steel we had twenty minutes of awkward silences and

downcast eyes. Billy was a sad guy with straw hair and gentle blue eyes. He was soft, like a poet or something. In his quiet and fumbling way he let me know "the action" was getting too hard for him, he just wasn't built for it, especially the part that was coming up — at the time we were all busted on a sure ticket to the penitentiary. Billy jumped bail and left for Australia the next day.

I heard from him now and again, letters smuggled to me between bars and spaced over the years. Enthusiastic descriptions of his new life — charter boat, wonder-wife, and two, going on three, kids. He urged us to join him "down under" when we got out. But between doing our time and escaping, being on the run and being on the road, me and Denny were now wanted by five law enforcement agencies, seven states and three countries. We had eaten up the last eight years without even knowing where they'd gone, let alone getting ourselves all the way to Australia. This desperado business was a time-consuming one.

"Maybe we ought to check out Australia, Denny."

"What? What the fuck you talking about now, Bobby?"

"Aw, never mind. Hey!" My voice got excited again. "Remember the 'Beauty and the Beast' act we used to have? You and Billy and me?" Denny slapped the wheel and we both laughed, remembering.

As kids we had a shoplifting trick. Team work. Denny would keep point while me and Billy worked the store. Even in those days I had a face that belonged on a WANTED poster so it was left to me to go in first. I would almost whistle as I moved from counter to counter touching things and giving the clerks the occasional sneaky eye. It would take all of a New York minute to have their fullest suspicions rivetted upon me. About then the door would open and without having to look up I would know it was Billy. Standing there all scrubbed and angel-faced, looking like he was fresh off helping some old lady to cross the street. Billy was the kind of kid Lassie would wait outside a door for. The clerks were too intent on me as their villain to pay him any mind. All I had to do was give Billy long enough to make his move and be gone again before I tried to leave. Almost always my way would be barred. I'd be subjected to questions, sometimes a search, all played to the background of my appropriate indignation. We usually rendezvoused down the street and around the corner, slapping hands and howling with laughter before we counted the swag. Later we would take it to the back door at Stinky Johnson's place and make a trade for a handfull of pills and a mickey of ninety-proof whiskey — it blurred the edges and made the streets a little easier.

Denny braked to make the turnoff I was indicating and we left the pavement for a dirt side road in the middle of nowhere. The jewels of

Rhyolite were hidden behind the hills. We still had a couple of hundred miles to travel but I promised this would be our last stop before continuing home. After a few miles of being jostled by potholes and assailed by pebbles hitting the underside of the car, Denny was shutting down the motor and pushing the gearshift into P for PARK. The road had dwindled into nothingness and we faced a small house that looked like a sad ending.

"Hang T here. I'll just be a minute." I closed my door, opened the back one.

Denny grumbled something incoherent, probably obscene, annoyed by this sidetrip. I took a box from the backseat, and a footpath towards the house.

There was a light on at Frieda's when I knocked. Frieda was old, hard to judge what age exactly. Grey-hair-in-a-bun-old. Stoop-shouldered-old. She had out-lived her family and was all by herself now. Frieda had been out here in this harsh and lonely high desert country for thirty years with just the moon, a few jackrabbits, a little scrub-brush, and the things that crawl in the night. Her home was made of glass bottles, thousands of them, all colours and sizes, all fitted and stacked and mortared. If you came in daylight you could see where rooms had been added on, changes made, walls lengthened. Time period bottles. A lot of years of desert picking and careful matching had gone into the building of this house. Her front yard even had a bottle fence about three feet high which enclosed her source of pride and joy. Frieda kept a garden there, her glass flower garden. Glass of every colour and shape carefully wedged into intricate patterns on the ground. Surreal botany. Frieda's masterpiece. With temperatures hovering at 115 degrees from May until September it was all the flowers she could ever have. I never asked many questions of Frieda — I felt thirty years in the desert, building a home from pickings, spoke for itself. I wouldn't want to know any more about a person than that.

"Hello, Frieda."

"Hallo. Who are you?" She stood there in white orthopedic shoes, sagging brown stockings and a faded print dress lending character to a pair of thin wire glasses.

"I'm Bobby. Your friend, Frieda. I brought you something from California."

I held out the box I carried. Inside was a Tiffany lampshade I'd found in an antique shop before leaving San Francisco. Frieda never remembered me except one time when I'd come in the same car twice in the same week. She remembered cars, their colour. It never occurred to her that people would own more than one car in one

lifetime. But Frieda doesn't have to remember things like names and people.

She took the box. "You had better come in and have some tea with me then, Bob-bee," turning my name over, testing it like a musical note — or making fun of my alias. It's hard to tell with Frieda, how much she knows.

One time I had stayed for tea and Frieda had given me a lecture on the principles of light and refraction. A nonsensical and mystical theory on the relationship of light, and the sun, and the moon — the way the planets moved and how life worked. Then she explained her garden to me. She said all the glass had to be lined up in a certain way, because when it was all in place, prisms aligned just so, it would form "the perfect light" and God would come to get her.

I didn't have time, tonight, for a lecture or for tea. "I can't, Frieda. Not this time, okay? I just wanted to give you this for your garden." I hesitated in the doorway. Wanting to watch. She pulled the Tiffany out of the shredded packing and held it up to the light.

"Oh, my. It's lovely Bobby. Absolutely lovely." She cooed over the multi-hued glass, stroking the stained strips, fingers racing from colour to colour. Her mouth smiled small and her eyes danced. Frieda was pleased.

"So lovely. Thank you. Mmmmmmm. And you'll never guess what else. I got another one that looks just like this one. It came in the mail just last week, too. All the way from Australia."

Frieda paused and her eyes grew big thinking about how far before she looked straight into me, eyes turned mocking and timeless.

"That's right," she said. "Australia. Some man took a picture of my house and put it in a magazine and this boy in Australia, he saw the magazine and wrote me a letter. He sent me this."

She set down the Tiffany she was holding, reached up and produced another from a shelf. They were a perfect match.

"You can read the letter if you like," said Frieda. "It's there in the back."

She waved somewhere behind her as if it were already diminished to a distraction. Frieda was seemingly lost again in searching the angles of refraction, trying to catch the right light in her latest glass.

I stood on wooden legs in the open doorway, hesitant to take that first step into the back. I didn't need to know more, finally. I kissed Frieda on the cheek before turning to leave.

"I'll be back this way in a few weeks," I said, but she didn't acknowledge my kiss or my departure. Her voice followed after me, and when I paused in the middle of her garden, Frieda was still talking to herself. The sound carried softly across the moonlit night, almost like

a child's song, "I know where these go. I know where these go."

Denny watched me in the rearview as I came around the back of the car, and stopped to get something from the trunk before climbing in next to him. He began to drive away before I had my door fully closed.

Not all the pistols were still in a suitcase. Not while the reflection of a face that belonged on a WANTED poster still followed me.

The dust billowing out behind us tumbled grey in the night and **seemed** to swallow the road as quickly as we passed over it. Shortly, the light spilling from Frieda's doorway flickered once, then disappeared. Sffft. As if her house had been extinguished by a huge teardrop, the colour of india ink.

Denny pulled back onto the blacktop and accelerated south down the endless road.

Stephen Reid, Kent Prison

Informers

I watched the old man on
the witness stand,
a heroin magnate, supposedly ex.
Made a deal. Put six of his
grandchildren in jail,
wrote a book he called *Omerta*,
and didn't know the joke involved.

He fingered me in the box.
A forgotten thing that had to be
"cleared up". He smiled
easily over his
rehearsed answers.
The Crown Attorney and he had
more than an understanding of
the answers, men who hire someone
to do their killing.

I got twenty years for not being
on the right side.

It Starts Raining, on Cue

3 miles out of Blind River
with an Exxon road map
and a suspended driver's licence
driving a black Trans-Am
lonely north Ontario hardtop
it's late
and we're over the speed limit.

Black night
interior light
A Labatt's Blue
squeezed between the denim.

Roadside warning,
Slippery when Wet.
I've got your mouth on my mind.

On the Road, Again

Staring out the wirescreen windows
of a dirty grey bus
wearing stainless-steel leg-irons
on a chain for the coast.

Eleven new convicts riding
a century to the wall.
Verdicts still ringing, numbers
slashed freshly across the chest.
Three days and four nights on a
cross-country roll, in blue denim
coveralls wearing a century and a half
of time.

Overweight guards with underarm stains,
sit inside caged personalities.
A finger in their nose, a 12-gauge in their lap,
they're working on yesterday's answers.

This morning we pulled over in
Portage La Prairie, stumbled out on
public display in a service station parking lot.
Some motorists tried to sneer, others turned away,
but their daughters waved to us anyway.
On board, first-timers replied with
insolence; the ones who still cared looked
down. My eyes just stayed on the 12-gauge shotguns.

I already knew the 99 names of hell.

Pavement roaring down my throat,
destination on my mind. I've got a
three-time hole in my heart and I'm
all out of questions this time.

Turn signal's clicking; I've got a
lockpick in my brain.
Come the next stop, I'll try to
break this goddamned chain.

Stephen Reid, Kent Prison

The "Bad" People

Although he had been born and was still living in a tough, slum neighbourhood, the little boy's parents had taught him to have respect for elderly people. This respect was strengthened by his grandparents from both sides of his family who doted on him. Every time he visited them, they spoiled him. They lavished affection on him and either baked or bought his favorite foods and desserts. He loved both sets of grandparents but his father's mother was his favorite one.

Whenever he visited her, he would help her with whatever she happened to be doing at the time whether it was peeling vegetables, washing dishes, cleaning the house or doing the laundry. Whatever she told him, he accepted it as the gospel truth. One particular subject she emphasized to him was the evils of alcohol; her father had been an alcoholic and she had suffered as a child because of it. It seemed to the boy that every time he visited her, she would preach to him that only "bad" people drank beer and alcohol. Her constant mention of the evilness associated with alcohol made a deep impression on the little seven-year-old boy.

There were taverns on nearly every street corner in his neighbourhood and the boy had seen men staggering out of them and being sick on the sidewalk or street on many occasions. His mother warned him to stay clear of the taverns and their customers. His mother's warning, combined with his grandmother's preaching, convinced him that people who drank beer and alcohol were, indeed, "bad" people.

One day, accompanied by three of his friends, he walked over to the next street from the one where he lived. On one side of the street were railway tracks and on the other side were shacks and vacant, decaying buildings. He joined his friends in throwing rocks at the front door of one of the shacks and one of the rocks, thrown higher than the others, broke a window in the door. The door opened and a little old lady stood in the doorway. When his friends saw her, they yelled "witch" at her and ran away. Just as he was preparing to run away himself, the little boy looked at the woman and saw that she was crying. Not only that but she reminded him of his grandmother

— the one he loved so much! Instead of fleeing, the boy walked over to the old lady and put his small, thin arms around her and told her he was sorry. He promised to pay for the window and to help clean up the broken glass. The old woman invited the boy into her house and, although he was very young and poor himself, he felt pity for her and her poverty when he saw the inside of her home. In the kitchen, there was a small wood stove, a card table, two folding chairs and only one tap over the sink from which cold water ran; newspapers covered the windows. In a small room leading off of the kitchen was a foldaway cot and two orange crates that served as dressers. After looking around the shack, the boy looked at the old lady, she had such a nice, kind face. Feelings of love and compassion overwhelmed him; he would be her friend and look after her.

For the following two months, the boy spent all of his free time with the old woman. When he got out of school each day, he would run over to her place. He stole food from his house and brought it to his new friend. Any money he earned for running errands, he gave to her. He even went to the city dump pulling his little wagon that he had got for his birthday to gather wood for her stove so that she would be able to cook her food and be warm. His friends teased him about his association with her and his mother advised him not to spend all of his time with the old lady because it wasn't "healthy," but nothing deterred him until, one day, when he went to visit her, he saw, sitting on the card table, an opened bottle of beer and a half-filled glass.

He looked at the woman, then at the beer and back to the woman, turned around and walked out the front door without uttering a word. The old lady called out after him but he ignored her and just kept walking until he arrived home. He went to his bedroom, laid down on his bed, and cried.

He never returned to see the old lady again except, when in the company of his friends, he would join them in throwing rocks at her front door and when she came to investigate, they would all yell "witch" and run away.

His voice was always the loudest.

George Watson, William Head Prison

Prison Voltage

It is a closed circuit:
our time
their hallways —
the electricity
charges from breaker to capacitor
and back
invisible in the wiring.
Our lightbulb heads glow
with hate.

The Modern War

In the spring of 1985
when Kozo Takamoto was chronologically 37
they led him quietly away
from the solitary cell
to a busy flight of planes
packed with travelling terrorists.

Three Israeli prisoners of war
had been exchanged for 1,100 enemies of the state:
it was a Red Cross transfer.
Kozo Takamoto had stood back to back
with his Red Army comrades
with machine gun and grenade
slaying the anonymous crowd, Lod Airport 1972 —
he hadn't expected to survive.

Guards Meet the Prisoners

We sat
stiff
and stared at our feet
while they recited the very minutes.
“Is that alright with you?”
the head suit asked.
Our silence
used to be called dumb insolence
now stilled and acquiescent.
The directive’s requirement
for inmate input into decision making
had been fulfilled.

John Abbott, Matsqui Prison

FAIRWEATHER SAILING

"Them white boys ain't shit!"

"Tell the truth Big Man."

"Hey Eight Ball, when I get out I'm gonna have me one of them fine white bitches."

Steve sat holding his book on the cold bench near the shower stall. Its plastic curtain hung in damp flaps along the long rents in it. If someone got up to shower he would have to move. There were rows of smudged numbers in the margin. Who would write in a book like that? And he couldn't concentrate on the cowboy's names anymore. Steve held onto the book like a screen so he didn't have to see them.

"I had me this funky peckerwood whore. Da bitch LOVED me ..."

"Fuck the bitches. I'm gonna kill me one of them!"

Steve felt time was standing on his throat. He knew who was talking. It was the one they called Big Man. He was heavy and middle aged, with a bulging wide face and dull little red eyes, pinny like a pig's. Steve slowed his breath so his hands wouldn't shake. They are talking at me. There are thirteen men in here; only three are white. Why doesn't someone get up. If he went back to his bunk he would have to walk past them and they would know he was running. All the shapes on the double bunks were very still. He wished he was back on the boat. His breath went in and out and he smelt his own nervous sweat but he wasn't going to have a shower now. Steve was skinny and small, with the fine features of his mother beneath his incongruously grey hair. When the sheriff came by he was going to ask for a phone call. It was urgent. The book was tight in his hands although the print was a blur now.

He could hear the wheels of the chow wagon grind on the cement floor. The wave of human noise broke against their bars. Several cells down was being fed. Steve glanced out from under the fringe of his grey blanket as a black hand forced a loaf of bread between the bars. The bread slapped down onto the long slab metal table. Big black hands tore the soft plastic apart. Steve had often done his shift cooking while Percy slept and Lawrence kept watch on deck. He had

become adept discerning details like the number of slices of bread in a loaf to the number of crewmen per meal. He had kept notes. Steve was a meticulous rationer. He couldn't help himself. There were thirteen men in the cell and twenty six slices of bread. Big Man had squeezed seven slices into a ball and was gnawing on it. Lydell had packed another handful into an old bread bag which he jammed into his coverall pocket.

Steve didn't slip off his rack until the tattooed white guy across from him staggered up and shuffled out towards the dayroom door slot and the yellow trays. Steve wanted to report them for taking more than their share, but he was anxious about telling the guard out loud: he would have to get a piece of paper and a pencil. When he was young he would sit still and eavesdrop on his parents to hear what they really thought of him. After many years of practice it was a habit now and his hearing was sharp. He naturally assumed everyone else was carefully listening. He liked the way deer stood very still and listened first in the forest before they moved. Steve was physically quite cautious too.

Lunch was macaroni, a dollop of wilted lettuce salad, jello, coffee and the white bread. Steve was reassured to see a tall white sheriff supervising the food distribution. A tray was pushed through at him, he put it on the table and stepped back to the bars.

"Excuse me officer."

"Hey move on Holmes," a Chicano muttered behind him. The sheriff stared off into space.

"Officer, eh, I'm wondering if I might make a phone call later. My name is Steve Fairweather. I have a friend I want to phone about bail." A burst of laughter ripped out behind him.

"White boy wants da get out of jail free card. Oh Pleeze, Mista Poleece, Sa!"

Steve gazed up at the sheriff's face, hoping to share his eyes. The sheriff backed away with the food cart and bawled out. "Gate Three, chuck wagon coming through."

God this was awful. It's these damn orange coveralls. We all look the same. And with all these negroes yelling and goofing off. Steve went back to his tray, but they had been to it first. The jello was gone and a cigarette butt had appeared in the river of his macaroni. Steve glanced around momentarily, he saw half a dozen smouldering lights but he didn't want to look up and meet any of their eyes. Very fastidiously he removed his tray from the table and picked his steps over to the toilet. Lunch was over. He retreated to his upper bunk. Even that was unfair. In the lower bunks you could hang blankets off the sides of the frame above and create a dark cocoon. When Steve was flat on his back and looked up, his constellation was the pentan-

gle dusty frame of one of the yellow roof lights. Its glare was interminable, and he felt his patience was only finite.

"Hey partner, you gotta a smoke?"

"Sure, just a minute." Steve dug quickly in his pockets for the pack of Lucky Strikes that one of the Federal agents had pressed on him. Steve didn't smoke himself.

"I'm Psycho. What's your handle?"

"Excuse me?"

"Lots of niggers here." Psycho winked and grinned and there was a dark hole where his uppers and lowers would have been. "You think I should put my choppers in when I go to court?"

"Well I don't know ..."

"You look kinda of clean still. They got my leathers in the change-room. Don't need no hangers to get them to stand up. If I watered them I could grow all kinds of tropical shit. Then we'd get high. You got an old lady?"

"I'm not married."

"How about a light?"

Steve hesitated. "I don't smoke." The light on Psycho's eyes flickered like the line of luminescence on a fly's eye. He leaned backwards on to the bars and pushed the new cigarette through toward the day table. "Hey Lydell." The thin black was smoking; his sinewy neck ducked down to the bar beside Psycho, their cigarette tips met. Psycho sucked deeply and there were two bright orange lights in the shadow. Steve recrossed his legs and shivered.

"Hey, you got another smoke?"

Steve looked back into Psycho's bloodshot blue eyes. They looked so soft and doleful. He held his pack out automatically. Psycho reached in and pulled out a couple and tucked one behind each ear. His long dirt greased hair hung in dank sheaths covering the smokes. Psycho smiled.

"When's your old lady coming?"

"Doreen is living on the boat. We have a thirty-six foot Hatteras shell with custom upperwork. I did all the deck fittings myself. With matching brass cleats and stanchions and a Willard five-gear sail winch, the kind they use for blue water auto-sailing."

"You in for dope?"

"We sailed back from the Far East and then this happened. I don't know anything about the details but Doreen says the Coast Guard tore out the main cabin panelling. It was Hong Kong teak; I waited six weeks for the installation in Taipei and now those oafs have ripped it

all out. I can't understand the stupidity of those bureaucrats. They could have asked me and I would have carefully dismantled the parts they wanted to look behind, but they didn't even bother. And that's what we are paying taxes for."

Psycho fished a long wet snot out of his nose and wiped it on the edge of Steve's bunk. Steve stopped talking and just stared at him.

"Was it smack?"

"Yes."

Psycho straightened up and blew several smoke rings inside each other. They chased along until the backcell concrete wall broke up their short run. "Ya didn't like lunch much did ya!"

Psycho was on the hustle. He slung the heavy mop from wall to wall. The floor glistened in its wake. He kept his head down and scoped the dentist station with the edges of his vision. Herbie, the dental tech, was a fag. He also had the key to the pillbox. If Herbie wanted to get to know you he would write a three day script for Darvocet — you would be back. For a little exploration, Herbie would turn you on to a handful of Darvons. But Herbie liked variety so Psycho steered attractive dental problems Herbie's way — sometimes the transaction needed explaining. Herbie leaned back from an open mouth and signalled the high five. They were both regulars. Psycho nodded and backed into the mop room with his heavy bucket. He pulled the door almost closed. This area was no man's land; a pig could turn the corner anytime and order him back to his assigned floorspace. Psycho had the Hole hallway, where the boys saved up their shit to throw on the guard's uniforms at chowtime; bloods had the hallways by the sergeant's office and the telephones — no messes up there. The dayshift floor sergeant was Washington, another blood, so Psycho knew he was lucky to be out mopping up at all. As he stood still and lit up a smoke, two voices started up outside the door.

"You waiting for the candyman?"

"Lydell, come here blood. My man from the neighborhood put me straight on something."

"Who you on about, not that skinny little nigger always mopping up.?"

"No man, it's Retread, he says there's a rat in our cell. He be listening into a call from downstairs. A rat motherfucker goin' in front of the grand jury and they trying to keep it hid. Some bad surprise for some poor brother."

"What we gonna do?"

"Ain't but one place for da snake."

"I'm getting mine here!"

One of the niggers was sitting with Herbie when Psycho slipped out the mop room door. He'd come back tomorrow, but right now other things were happening. Psycho quietly locked up when visits were announced. Steve was hanging by the gate. Psycho moved alongside him; he figured he would share the news, do his duty to the white race. Steve jerked away when he felt Psycho at his elbow. A guard called Steve's name and he left eagerly with the chain for the visiting room.

"Where's Doreen, Laurel?"

"She couldn't make it, Steve. She has taken it hard, being arrested and taken down to the Federal Building and questioned for hours and hours. They even took away her glasses. So she's gone down to the airport to pick up Lawrence."

Steve pushed the receiver closer to his ear. The hubbub of the other prisoners was overwhelming Laurel's soft voice. He looked sharply over his shoulder. The Big Man was slapping his fat hand against the grimy plexiglass, a hand crisscrossed with thin raised scars, a palm massive and white like a slab of fat pork. "I say you best be here bitch WITH da paper. Listen good. I ain't playing!"

"Laurel, how did Lawrence get out so quickly?"

"Oh it is something his lawyer worked out. I should have been pre-law instead of a teacher. I'm afraid I'm almost useless at explaining these legal things. Your mother has been phoning down every night; she is desperately worried for you. You know about her operations and the cobalt treatments. I really like talking to her on the phone — it's like old times. But that last time I went to visit at the hospital was just ghastly. She threw up right in front of me on her bible. I had to clean her up and I almost was sick myself. Lawrence did say that he had to tell the detectives that "Tomorrow's Hope" was your boat and that you were the captain. He said it didn't matter anyway because they already had the registration and he didn't want to confuse things."

"Laurel, listen to me. I think all of these phones are being bugged. Don't say anything more. You've got to go and see a lawyer and get him up here right away. I can't even get a phone call here, not even to an attorney. The sheriffs are all robots and most of them are black." Steve held the receiver right to his lips and began to whisper, "And they only let the same bunch of negroes use the phones."

The word "negroes" fell like a hanged corpse in the cramped visiting room. In the sudden silence, the Big Man froze and slowly turned his head, scowling. Laurel couldn't hear Steve and told him to speak up. Steve's peaked face immediately blossomed a radiant pink. His elbow was a bare six inches from Big Man's huge arms. Steve

froze and stared in open fear at Laurel.

"Laurel, do something. Take the lawyer down to the boat and give him those bolts of silk as a retainer. There are thousands of dollars worth there. Just get me out of here, I'm going crazy. Please Laurel, bring Doreen and get the bail money. We only need 10% of fifty thousand."

"I think Lawrence already did something with that silk, Steve. I took my Vespa out for a spin — you know the one that you worked all afternoon on that day it rained so hard — and I drove down along the Marina and there was Lawrence loading them into the back of a delivery truck. Well he wasn't exactly but he had two guys, one of them was a real hulk, dark and handsome looking and Lawrence said he'd have a matching dress and scarf done up for me in that beautiful shade of aquamarine. He knows some Vietnamese seamstresses. I'll wear them both for you when I come to visit as soon as I get them. Anyway ..."

Steve gave up. With his chin propped on his palms he stared past Laurel's head at the clock on the wall. He held the receiver away from his ear and smiled vaguely as she gesticulated. It was enough to keep the current flowing; he didn't want her leaving in a huff.

A glowing cigarette butt sparked against his leg and fell to smoulder at his feet. A turnkey yelled, "Next shift, Move'm on out."

The TVs had been wheeled away. The domino game was over. It was late. The coldness of insomnia ran along the steel slab bunk and the grimy concrete walls. The air was still and flat. Steve lay there and suddenly he realized that he had never even seen an insect since he had been inside. On the very top edge of the ceiling and the back wall he could see the outline of a window but they had painted it over. It was so late that everyone else was still. They looked like corpses with the gray blankets over their heads. If he could have Big Man and Lydell and Eight Ball dead only at the price of the other's deaths, so be it. Steve wished that they were dead. All of them. They were scum, dirt, water, goofs, he silently mouthed these comfortable words over and over. They never worked an honest day in their lives. And they smiled and laughed; he didn't want to see their inane good times. Fucking tribesmen! Banging those dominos — Dead Man's eyes, Two Coins, Times Three — that rang out like gunshots each time they fingerflipped the bones against the hard steel table. They can't do it quietly. They have to make noise, draw attention to themselves. Hate. He would take his torch and broil those opaque, dancing black eyes till the membranes sizzled and popped, and they screamed for silence, for mercy and then he'd kick the jack out and the truck frame would settle through their chests, crushing their ribs, silencing their

insulting hyperactive lungs and it would all be over. The body snatchers would come and put gray blankets over them and all would be quiet. Just Steve, the veteran traveller, and he'd smile softly to himself. I told you so, you should have listened.

If he could just get out.

A low monotone voice was grinding at the seal of his warm dream cocoon. Steve turned his head on the plastic mattress to dismiss the intrusion but the more he wanted to retreat the faster his phantasm world evaporated. Once again he was wide awake beneath the bare night light. So he listened to the voice below him.

"It's the cycle of change. It's the last phase. I'm on to the last phase. I'm beyond life. They cannot hold me because my energy field will be total. Invisible, by the last number on the clock I'll be completely phased in; the wise ones can beam me aboard. Jesus was tortured and they knew not what they did. Astronomers were burned alive. But we are in an age of stone tombs and fallout shelters. They can't hide it from me. I can see. I am becoming the next, the last phase. When it is absorbed into my every cell, then the chains and the cuffs will absorb my energy and their molecules will relax and the chains will be broken. All of them will turn to dust to be reorganized again. The distances are unbelievable between each part and the things they built and believe in will be no more. They will dissolve themselves, but before they do they will look at me as I glow and they will realize that I am on to the next phase as they are laughing and dissolving and saying, "you're too crazy?" And the doctors who have tried to poison me will decompose into organic slime with all their wisdom and it will be nothing. No one will survive. No one recognized the signs but me. I know they are coming. I'll be a bridge, an ambassador and all these castles of doubt will disappear. I won't take any more pills; I must keep clear. The last phase is touching me, it's almost here."

The tense hushed whisper spilled into Steve's consciousness. This man has left. Christ, what a mess. Steve hadn't recognized the voice so he ventured a peek down over the bunk rim. A bird's nest of matted brown hair, a thin snake of a scar across the top of the skull where the hair wouldn't grow, the guy was kneeling. So this was the third white in the cell. The one who stayed behind the curtain of blankets during the day. Shit, they should do something for him. How could this happen?

At the end of the central corridor Steve heard the distinctive squeal of the chow wagon. Six AM but he could never tell from the ascent of the sun because it didn't exist inside. My lawyer left a message that he'd come this afternoon. It's about time. His friends outside were working to get him out. He felt a gush of love for them

all as well as a little shame for his doubting thoughts. It could be worse. Who cares for the madman below. It was only a matter of time before the sheriffs called Steve's name and he rejoined mankind outside. Let them scream and cackle like a troop of monkeys, he'd be out, in the bosom of his boat, gently rocking beside the dock. They'd be grooming each other's corn braids, spitting and screaming in their cages. Steve held himself tightly and waited with the calm assurance of those who have been taught that things come to those who wait.

"Reuben K. Finegold." The swarthy hirsute lawyer nimbly leapt up and pursued Steve around the tiny interviewing room table and seized his hand. "Steve, isn't it. Look I know that you've been waiting. I got up as soon as I could but I've got this Conspiracy to Traffic case running down in Courtroom 602 and it's been a bitch — eleven defendants, dozens of motions, a rat who the Feds wrung out to dry and then turned over again and recanted his testimony. My guy isn't up 'til tomorrow, so what can I do for you?"

From Steve's seat he could see the burly back of a sheriff guarding the various lawyer interviewing room doors. Does it get that ugly? Steve was glad as a child to see his lawyer, a stranger whom he had never seen before, but he kept his composure: civilization had reappeared. He hadn't had much exposure to lawyers. He hadn't even been divorced or anything, but his grandfather's best friend had been an attorney and Steve remembered him quite well as a tall, kindly patrician of a man. Steve smiled sweetly throughout Finegold's speedy intro.

"Thank you for coming by. You must have a busy schedule. I must apologize for my circumstances here but it is my first time and I'm not familiar with the process of the law."

"That's what I'm here for Steve. Now the first thing is to get you out of this dump. Your girlfriend Laurel there ..."

"No, Laurel's not my girlfriend. Well, she is a friend, I mean ..."

"Sure, now she said bail at the Police desk is fifty thousand. O.K. I have a good friend, Pinkie Azevedo, he runs Golden West Bailbonds, just on my word alone he'll go the bail. That's no problem. I'll pick up the five G's from you tomorrow. I'll run downstairs, make the call, slam bang thank you mam, you have a shower and wash it all off and you and your girl can make dinner at Trader Vic's, or someplace else down on the Marina. What quay is your yacht docked at anyway?"

"Number Five. "Tomorrow's Hope" is her name."

"Sure, I know the place."

"Can I borrow a pen and a piece of paper?"

"Sure, here. O.K. Steve I'll get the nitty gritty from the D.A.

tomorrow, see if there is an angle that we can work out. Here's my card; I got to go. My man is about to walk and I want to be there. You're in good hands. That babe's quite a dish, eh!" Reuben Finegold winked with lascivious comraderie at Steve; in his own mind he was already between her smooth wasp thighs, she had that quality of vulnerability. He snapped his briefcase shut with abrupt finality and strode over to the door. After the sheriff unlocked it, the lawyer was gone.

Steve leaned back in the afterglow of his attorney interview. Things were moving. His man was on the job. Tonight, sure. It's 1:30 PM now so I've got about three or four hours to wait. It wasn't until the sheriff barked at him to move the lead out of his ass and he was walking back across the disinfected concrete to the cells that a sense of trepidation slipped in amongst the oblivious optimism of his thoughts.

The bars were thick and beaded with old paint. Steve had grown accustomed to looking through them. This time he saw with a start that there were pairs of black arms reaching into his bunk. Eight Ball had lifted up Steve's plastic mattress and was fishing around underneath it. His ace-deuce Lydell was right beside him except when he saw Steve he jumped out to watch his partner's back. The sheriff keyed open the cell door and Steve stepped in, indignant and disturbed, and his little feet carried him quickly down the long space between the bunks.

"What are you doing?" Steve blurted.

"Get out of my face!" Lydell said and they shouldered past Steve. The two blacks strode back to the dayroom table, sat down and got to talking low and fast to each other while flashing the hot whites of their eyes back at the shadows.

Steve felt like he had won that small engagement — the victor remained on the field of battle. He kept his back to them and looked under the mattress himself to see what was there: an empty cloth sack of Bull Durham, the charred black stub of a toothbrush, (what had they done that for?). If he could read leaves he could have made a prophecy in the dried scattering of rough tobacco. Poor pickings. He did an automatic inventory of his present material possessions: Finegold's new Bic, the folded sheet of yellow pad paper, his property receipt flimsy, the Lucky Strikes. The Samoan guard he had had to strip and bend for had eyed him over and said, "No watch, no rings, they just take them." So he couldn't even tell the time. Steve had liked the Samoan though; he liked the Pacific islanders in general: their ponderous, solemn faces, and they sat so permanently, like gods on

the sunstroked beaches and in the prows of those carved ocean canoes. He had his imagination though and it was right at hand.

Soon enough.

Soon enough when they realized the extent of their misunderstanding concerning him, he would be released. When he recalled their journey there wasn't any proof: no witnesses, no fingerprints, no personal responsibility. Yet that damn Lawrence saying that Steve was the captain. Who had organized the crew and set the watches on deck? Who had brought that Philipino girl along on the promise of taking her to the States when they had all agreed that it was too crowded and there wouldn't be any passengers. Steve chastised himself for not taking action, for being passive in the face of Lawrence's energy. Lawrence brought her and Lawrence discarded her, saying that she wanted to get off at Rabaul to visit relatives. But Steve had overheard as Lawrence had sent her off to buy fresh fruit and vegetables; as soon as she had blended into the dark swarm at the market harbour, they had cut anchor and sailed out. Steve blushed even now at his shame and impotence. He hadn't loved her or even known her really but the poignancy of being abandoned in a foreign land brought tears to the edges of his eyes. He had known that Lawrence was an asshole. What he couldn't fathom was why he had gone along with him for so long.

4 o'clock. The Price is Right. He stared at the ceiling. That god-damn TV is on so loud. These fucking stiffies sitting there like zombies. After so many months in the vast silent ocean this audial blitz was immediate, intrusive and unnerving. The limits of fucking sanity; this is like those techniques they use to suck the brains of spies, leaving no physical marks. He used to relax on deck watching the waves roll and flow. His mind was the ocean and the smooth liquid furrows were the natural rhythms of his brain. But here the world was close, static, a bell jar and echo chamber of the most erratic, discordant and twisted patterns, all thrashing around in the broken glass. The noise screamed at him and he tightened and froze in its din. Where's Finegold? He made a promise. And Laurel knew what had to be done. A few minutes more he told himself, when his hysteria tugged at his seams. Just ride out the storm.

"Hey Psycho, listen to me man."

Psycho shifted his head in closer to Lydell's. He still held his pinochle hand close to his chest.

"Man you been inside. There's some serious shit coming down in the cell here. It ain't nothing racial, nothing like that, but there's a rat in here with us."

"Ya, who?"

"It's been figured down to those motherfuckers in the last bunk. That bug and the new skinny dude with the gray hair. We ain't got nothing with you man: we all going to the pen, but we going to take care of this business first."

"Ain't nothing to me," Psycho smiled his wide crazy grin and laid his cards flat on the table, "I been knowing Big Man for years now, shit, we worked in the laundry together." He turned his face slowly so it shone on each of the three players individually, "Just don't get any blood on me!"

They all looked back at their cards. "Now spades is trump?" Psycho asked. Big Man nodded. The afternoon wore on.

Nothing yet. So it took a little longer. The police would stall just like any other government office; the more urgent you say your business is, the sooner that they go to sleep. Steve glanced down the alley into the dayroom. It was a lull like a siesta, the trouble was laying in blanket hammocks slung between the bars and the table. They had the TV seats, front and central. Sedated. Other blacks stood and shifted from hip to hip like gaunt cranes fixed by the interminable sirens. Their backs were all to him. With their attention so restricted the rest of the cell opened up as neutral territory. Steve had intended to have a bath outside when he was released but he was realistic, and he couldn't bear his own rank smell any longer.

Steve gathered up his towel and a bar of county soap and walked quietly through the dayroom to the shower stall. He thought it looked like a confessional as he pushed aside the dank plastic and pulled the rings along behind him. He shed his rubber sandals and placed them carefully outside the shower stall lip.

He peeked through one of the rents in the curtain but no one appeared to be watching him. Steve stepped forward and then recoiled in disgust: the shower floor tiling was damp and especially slimy near the drain. It was almost clogged with soapy hair, choked magazine paper and other flora he couldn't recognize but which he imagined might be alive. Steve was not alone; indeed a woman beckoned to him. The full length Swank centerfold urged him into the blonde hair between her legs. She was perfect but her colour was running in several central streaks and smears and she was ballooning off the wall from the close moisture. He was used to religiously sanitizing the boat's toilet cabinet, but he was determined not to get involved now.

He tentatively poked the shower button while standing as far off as he could from the waterspout. And what a surprise it was. A

powerful jet of hot, beautiful, cleansing water rushed out and cascaded off the opposing shower wall. He touched his foot to it and the water drew him in. What a luxurious feeling after all those dripping, trickling, lukewarm and cold, foreign showers and washes he had had on quaysides and at what were called inexpensive hotels. Once he was into the steamy cocoon he was rejuvenated, purged and made whole, the larger world was washed away, his essential optimism shone in its brilliance like the sheen of a new car in the sunshine after a full rain. The torrent did not diminish and for the first time since the shock of his arrest he approached the simplicity of happiness.

Psycho knew that it was coming down. He didn't turn his back watching the TV. Psycho was weaving a picture frame from a shoeboxful of empty Camels packs. If he had it done by the 28th the chicano Pato had a few papers for him. So he flattened and folded the packs, keeping the desert scene to the front, his eyes flitting from his work to the cellscape. No, that little new guy wasn't jointwise stepping off into the shower right now. Never can tell with these niggers. Psycho had his shank alongside his leg under a towel; once the blood is out anything could happen and how many white witnesses would they want around, not that he thought these stupid niggers could line up one idea in front of another. His step had to be really delicate. He couldn't be siding with no rat but who said the rat was white. He'd put the steel right through Big Man's belly if that crazy hambone came over towards Psycho's place on the wall.

Psycho watched as the three niggers came out of their hammocks and slid off into the bunk alley — they were too smooth not to be in concert. He held his breath and felt the strong juice squirt through his veins. He shivered. It was exciting and his eyes were dancing beneath his studied nonchalance but he didn't break the rhythm of his folding and sewing. The other blacks moved into a huddle in front of the TV and stared at it intensely. One of them turned up the volume and they all stayed very still. Everyone was wrapt in the moment.

The roar of the pouring water was in Steve's ears. It was the roar of the breakers, it was a tropical waterfall streaming over his head. As he relaxed his blood warmed and spread throughout his body. Doreen in the water, play wrestling with him, her bikini comes off in his hands. She splashes him and then she submerges and her hands are pulling down his shorts, and he holds his breath and savours the wait for her touch and she runs her fingertips along the crest of his cock. She surfaces and rubs herself up and down his body. He is hard

and eager and cups her ass in his hands and in the warm lucid water his cock slips into her in one smooth stroke. Steve began stroking himself, his eyes were shut tight, she was all there around him and when they tossed the body through the curtain on to the shower stall floor he thought for a moment that the chilly draft was just the afternoon breeze wafting in off the lagoon.

A cold hand grasped his foot and Steve screamed with surprise. The bearded face was bleeding from every hole; blood poured from the eyes, both blank and staring, the nose, the mouth and the ears. Blood slipped in half a dozen rivulets from channels of hair in the scalp. The body was trying to get up and it pawed at Steve's legs for support. Steve jerked free and staggered backwards, his hands flailed with the dank enveloping curtain. Not me, not me! The curtain tore some more and he fell through it out onto the cell floor. He wildly looked around expecting a blow, a kick, but there was no one out in the day room. He looked through the bars into the bunk alley as a black scuttled between the racks with a sponge in his hand which he threw away and then slipped into bed. All the other bunks were occupied with still man-size shapes but his and the one below it. Steve scrambled to his knees, the floor wet and slippery from his drippings. A hand came over the shower stall lip and it slowly pulled the madman's gaunt blood streaked head along with it. Suddenly Steve thought of ancient Christian paintings he had seen.

There was a clatter of boots behind him and a voice exclaimed, "Jesus Christ!" Steve turned and watched as a guard fumbled with his panic button.

"Ya, Finegold here."

"This is Laurel Burton, Steve's friend. You know we talked yesterday."

"Ya, the bail matter. Look, sweetheart, I got a call from the jail. Our boy is a suspect in a jailhouse homicide on top of what he's already carrying. That means no bail. Maybe we should get together and talk about this. How's lunch sound?"

John Abbott, Matsqui Prison

INTERVIEWS

The following four interviews were all conducted with prisoners and by prisoners in the Pacific Region of the Canadian Penitentiary System (A.K.A. Correctional Services of Canada). The ordering of the interviews reproduces the "cascading" principle of the penitentiary system: that is, we begin in Kent Institution, a maximum security prison, upstream on the Fraser at Agassiz; flow down river to Matsqui Institution, a medium security prison at Abbotsford; and come to rest on the shores of our western ocean at William Head Institution, a minimum security prison just west of Victoria, where the last two interviews were conducted. The last interviewee, who has recently been released from prison, has, to beat this metaphor into submission, presumably begun to realize his pacific possibilities as he sets sail on the great sea of parole.

The circumstances of these men — the length of their sentences, the amount of time they have served — will be seen to have a bearing on their responses. The interviews seek above all to present direct testimony on the pressure of facing and doing long time. Understandably and unavoidably, the interviews at times strayed from this focus, and although much of interest surfaced from these tangential discussions, the editors, owing to space constraints, were compelled to reduce such digressions to a minimum.

INTERVIEW WITH MAVA GILL

Age: 28

Sentence: Two consecutive 25-year minimum life

Crime: First degree murder

Time served: 8 years

Interviewed by James Gregory, Kent Prison.

MG: I find that laws are like cobwebs. They entangle the weak, and are broken by the strong.

JG: So you think for people to send men into — you could call this a torture chamber — for years and years is a serious matter.

MG: It has changed from the days when they gave you a ball and chain, and a big hammer to break rocks with. But the punishment itself, the pain itself, is still there. Before they'd say, okay, give you five years. You'd do the five years, and then you're out — or whatever, say the sentence was a maximum of ten years. You did the ten years, and you were out. Now they give you ten years, but they torture you for ten years. Before you knew where you stood.

JG: Kent's isolated out here a hundred miles from Vancouver.

MG: Give or take, yeah.

JG: In a valley surrounded by mountains.

MG: A horseshoe. A horseshoe of mountains.

JG: It's hidden away.

MG: It is. It's hidden away nicely.

JG: And the guys here are kept isolated from the community so people won't know what the hell is going on.

MG: There's no community participation in the institution. Once in a while they have somebody come in from the outside, like Michael Jackson, professor of law at U.B.C. He brings in law students for a seminar type of thing, and they talk about law procedures, and what could be done about this twenty-five year minimum. Cause it's a never-ending time. It's a — I feel it's a time-bomb. I have gotten to the point, well, there's a few nights I remember very clearly, because I

think about, well shit, twenty-five minimum. The anger builds up in me and then I can't sleep. You get so...

JG: Have you got anything to live for? Have you got any hope of eventually being released? Or do you think you may spend the rest of your life locked up in prison.

MG: Oh no. I, well, quite frankly, I will never ... at least, the way I feel now, I refuse to take my own life. I've heard people saying, "If they've got six bullets in a gun, they'll take five with them and save the last one for themselves." I don't believe in that. I believe that if there's that one extra bullet left, I want to take it down to hell with me.

Sometimes the dark side of me comes out. I've seen some of my friends get pretty fucked up, facing time, cause there's no light at the end of the tunnel. It's hard to imagine what you're going to be doing two years from now, but they've given me twenty-five, and I can't see myself starting off when I'm forty-six. I know I will never get parole.

JG: You don't think you'll ever be released?

MG: No. Not if ... the fifteen year review they give. It's more or less a carrot. So people keep hoping for fifteen. People doing twenty-five minimum, you could pretty well say they have nothing more to lose. And systematically they throw a fifteen year review in there, saying, well, there's a chance of getting out at fifteen. You know, you kiss ass all the way through for fifteen, and then you just didn't happen to kiss the right one at the right time, so you don't get out anyways.

JG: Do you think if you got out at the fifteen year point, you could live under the restrictions that would be imposed under you?

MG: Oh, I think so.

JG: As things stand, do you have a license to kill?

MG: That's more or less what they're giving us — a license to kill. There's nothing more they can do. The torture stops.

JG: What about special handling units? Are they a deterrent?

MG: SHU (Special Handling Unit) I don't believe is a deterrent. All it is is another prison where they've got you housed up for another two or three years. Then you get back out again. Going to SHU is like when you're out on the street and you're going to do time.

JG: SHU is solitary confinement?

MG: There's no programs, no nothing; all it is is confinement.

JG: Do you find solitary confinement easy to handle?

MG: It is hard on the head, but it's the first little while that you

have to adjust to. After two or three months you just settle in.

JG: What about when you get released from segregation? Is it difficult to re-adjust to population, to living with people?

MG: Yeah. I found it difficult. Not very, but you have to watch if you're on phase four.

JG: Phase four is a probationary period?

MG: More or less. You can stay in the boundaries if you don't get charged for every mickey-mouse thing in the unit, and keep an extremely low profile.

JG: Do you feel any ill effects from all that solitary confinement?

MG: I do. My memory's shot. It burnt a part of me out.

JG: Do you think solitary confinement is an effective punishment?

MG: Psychologically it's a torture.

JG: Do you find the guards are frightened of you because of the amount of time you are doing?

MG: I don't know. I really couldn't say that. There are several that I know are pretty foolish. They have no training whatsoever — not to be a living unit officer. I wouldn't be exaggerating if I was to say that some of the LUs are straight out of the farm fields. They don't know what this life is all about, prison life. You've got a human being that's there ... in other words you just can't get rid of it ... and it's not an animal ... but sometimes that's the impression they give. Then they wonder why, they reach out their hand and the hand is missing.

JG: When the twenty-five year minimum came out, special handling units were planned.

MG: There's a new institution built in New Brunswick. The rumour has it they're opening that up for a SHU. Three hundred sixty beds or something. In other words, three hundred sixty cages for a warehouse. What happens after? It's only going to go so far. Are they going to build another facility to warehouse people with that much time? What about when that's overflowing? Cause the twenty-five year minimums, they aren't going anywhere.

JG: Is there peer pressure on you guys to take hostages, attack guards and informers, or whatever?

MG: No. But people are asked to do things in here. You know they're got nowhere to go and not much to lose.

JG: Rehabilitation?

MG: There's no rehabilitation. Rehabilitation doesn't go anywhere past five years. For that they should have some kind of help. But they

have no help in here. I haven't seen any.

JG: Do you think that the system or the guards intentionally try to wear you down, gradually, slowly picking at you, 'til they reduce you to ... to like a vegetable ... a person who's broken, controlled, easy to push around?

MG: I don't know if that's the idea or not, but I certainly have no plans for letting them succeed. Cause what the fuck am I going to break down for. I have no hope of getting out at fifteen years review, because of my institutional convictions. And I have no hope of getting out at twenty-five.

JG: Do you think in this environment where guys are very unhappy, their nerves on edge, that little things like that, little aggravations, can blow up into very serious situations?

MG: Yes. They certainly can. What other recourse is there left.

JG: What do you think of interregional forced transfers?

MG: I don't agree with that, especially in the case of a person doing lots of time, and these days, they're passing out a lot of time. In any case, you're dealing with a man's life: he's in here, and his people on the street, their lives. There might be a guy that just recently got married, or whatever the case may be. Now all of a sudden they ship him to the other side of the country. And his family and friends are here in Vancouver and they can't make it all the way over there to see him.

JG: Are they intentionally trying to isolate the guy by breaking up his ties with the community?

MG: I don't know. I mean it serves no purpose but to get the guy frustrated. If they're doing that because he's a danger to the good order of the institution, which in most cases they use, what makes them say that he won't be a danger there. If not, more so, because he's already frustrated about leaving a place he doesn't want to leave, that's the nearest he can be to his people.

JG: What about the attitude that we have it too good in here?

MG: Whose attitude is that?

JG: Well, you read it in editorials, in letters to the editor in the newspapers, and hear it from the guards.

MG: Well, I'd trade places with anybody that thinks it's too good in here.

JG: Suicide used to be much more common in the penitentiaries that is now. Why do you suppose that is?

MG: I seriously don't know. I don't understand why they do that. I

had a very dear friend of mine kill himself and I could never understand why.

JG: Is there any incentive for you to work while you're here?

MG: For what?

JG: Do you think most prisoners would be dangerous if released?

MG: No. They're in here for no good reason a lot of them. They could function outside, like quite well.

JG: Does there seem to be a lot of solidarity between prisoners, a lot of fellow feeling?

MG: No. I don't think any of that is left anymore.

JG: Are all guys serving twenty-five minimum escape risks?

MG: No, not all of them. Some people, they've just lost hope.

INTERVIEW WITH EDDIE ROUSE

Age: 33

Sentence: 15 year minimum life

Crime: Non-capital murder

Time served: 10 years

Interviewed by John Abbott, Matsqui Prison.

JA: Would you like to say a few words about the lengthy prison sentences given here in Canada?

ER: The 10, 15, and 25 year minimum sentences. The guys doing 25 year minimums, they just can't see the end of it. No one has a conception of what they're going to be like or what it going to be like after 25 years. They changed the law in 1975: they held out the 15 year review as a carrot but no one has come up to that point yet, so no one knows what will happen.

JA: There was an article in the May 1985 edition of the Cemetery Road (from Kent Prison) by a prisoner in Dorchester who wrote that on an average 10 year minimum sentence, a guy ends up serving 15 years.

ER: That's true.

JA: And on a 25 year minimum that guys will serve at least 25 years.

ER: But you get someone who is in their 20's or late teens, and they've been hit with a 25 minimum; well Christ they will be 43 by the time that they have a chance to get out.

JA: What kind of sentence do you have Eddie?

ER: Well I started out with a 20 minimum life, then it was knocked down to a 15 year minimum.

JA: How many years do you have in now?

ER: Just over 10.

JA: How old were you when you began serving this sentence?

ER: 23.

JA: How does a person make sense of such a large period of time? How do they deal with it?

ER: You have to prepare yourself for it, for the inevitable, you can't conceptualize what you'll be doing, and on the street these numbers don't mean anything. A person undergoes pretty heavy psychological change when they start thinking about this time. If they let it get to them then they go crazy and end up in RPC (Regional Psychiatric Centre) or they become self-destructive or they turn their destructiveness outwards. It affects people around them.

JA: Do you know prisoners this has happened to?

ER: Sure, Jason Gallant is one of them. He turned his hate toward the system and the system fucked him. The last I heard he is in Millhaven; he just went on another murder beef inside, with several other people. He's gone the whole route. Here's a guy who came in when he was 18 or 19, and now he is his mid-thirties. He's doing a new 25 year minimum, and there is no way that they are ever going to let him out. The system made him dangerous inside instead of helping him come to terms with his so-called crime. They haven't showed him any alternatives. All of these places are just warehouses.

JA: What kind of alternatives?

ER: Well, one is the university program, but there aren't any programs to help these guys specifically doing life. All of these programs now are for people doing a set sentence. Most guys inside can see getting out in three or four years. But a life sentence isn't going to see the road for at least ten year. And it depends. There are some guys like Frank Williston; he came in when he was 16 and had a seven year minimum, before the law was changed and the moratorium extended on the death penalty, back in the 60's. So in 1980 he applied for parole. He was 33 at the time, and Parole Board told him that they didn't think he was ready to get out because he hadn't learned his lesson.

JA: After 17 years in prison.

ER: Ya. He grew up inside, had done over double his seven year minimum, and then the Parole Board said, "We can't let you out: you're too dangerous."

JA: That isn't how the system tells it to the public.

ER: The system lies. The penitentiary system is a big propaganda machine to scare the public into believing that everyone inside is dangerous. They don't have the ability for independent thought. Even when a person gets out on parole he finds that he's just exchanging one prison for another because under a parole you can't get married, you can't enter into any contracts such as purchasing a house or a car on credit without your Parole Officer's permission — you can't do anything without your Parole Officer's permission and

if you decide, well screw the PO, you're back in jail.

JA: On a life sentence that mean you have a lifetime parole?

ER: Ya, lifetime parole. You're never off it, they could pull you in on it 20 years later for some assault in the bar, you could be in your bloody 60's, I've seen old guys it has happened to, that were doing life sentences.

JA: In the kind of minor assault case which would have got an everyday citizen a fine?

ER: Or a suspended sentence, or probation.

JA: How much more time would one of these guys do once he had been pulled back in?

ER: Depends on the Parole Board.

JA: The Parole Board has absolute power?

ER: They do. They control every aspect of your life. You're not even allowed to have a bank account: they can freeze it and tell you how much money you can spend, where you can work, where you can live, who you can associate with. If you have a job and another offer comes up that is better, you can't quit your job without getting your Parole Officer's permission. If you don't, that is a breach of parole and you're back inside to teach you a lesson.

JA: That's a pretty expensive lesson.

ER: Sure it is. You have no recourse.

JA: How do guys, knowing that is what is ahead when they get out, make sense of the 10, 15 or 20 years they have to serve?

ER: They can't, it is impossible. All I know is that when I came in and the judge sentenced me to 20 years, any relationships I had, my ex-wife, I told her she had her own life, I have to do this many years and I can't see the judicial system correcting any mistakes that it might have made in regards to length of sentence. That was a decision I had to make, because a lot of people seem to have this fairytale belief in justice, and that just doesn't happen in the Canadian justice system. Still a lot of people have this belief in justice and it just doesn't work, and they try to hang on to things for as long as possible and they run into all sorts of personality problems when things start disintegrating, like their relationships with their families, and their friends no longer want to talk to them or just don't have time for them. Like life does just go on outside. I made that decision to break off ties. Trying to hold onto that belief that justice will prevail in the end is stupid. I haven't had that much trouble coping with this 20 year sentence. It was knocked down to 15, but, I just sort of, you have to bury your feelings, any feeling you came in

with you got to bury it, or put it deep behind a wall, because if you allow those feelings out, you're looked upon as pretty strange in here. And over a period of time you get pretty callous about things happening, like if you see someone get stabbed you're not worried about if this guy is going to die or not, you're worried about who is going to clean the blood up off the floor or how long the lock-up for investigation is going to be or what new changes in security are going to come down in the institution. I have watched people doing long time try to bury themselves and get away from it, try to ignore time by using pills and all sorts of drugs, but eventually it catches up with them. There is no way someone can keep it up for 20 years. In the end a lot of people have taken the final route out.

JA: Do you remember Shawn Shannon at Kent? He was doing a 10 year minimum life.

ER: No, I wasn't there, I was in Dorchester.

JA: The night he was to be involuntarily transferred to Dorchester he committed suicide.

ER: That's another thing the system likes doing: cutting you off from any contact with family or the street. And that's basically all you really have left in jail. When you're removed from that by 5 or 6 thousand miles, it is hard to maintain.

JA: You were involuntarily transferred to Dorchester Penitentiary in New Brunswick. Why was that?

ER: The Matsqui Riot of 1981. The Head of Security decided to force a guard witness to alter his statements as to his observations on the night of the riot. As a result I was charged with arson and mischief. When Tent City was made, I was grabbed at the first big frisk, a week after everybody went out to the tents. Fifty people were also grabbed. One month later I was shipped to Dorchester — they wouldn't give me a reason. At Dorchester they explained that the reason I was there was because there was no room at Kent Maximum.

JA: Were you actually charged with arson and mischief

ER: Yeh, but I never found out about it until two months later in the newspaper.

JA: What became of the charge?

ER: The security guard testified that the statement was not the exact statement he had initially made, that he had been forced to alter it. In June of 1982 in County Court in New Westminster he testified that the Matsqui Police detectives as well as the Head of Security had forced him to alter his statement. He said he had seen someone walk

out onto what was the golfcourse beside the administration building and throw a molotov cocktail through the administration building window, who he thought he recognized as me but in the next line he wrote that he didn't think it was me knowing my attitudes. That was it. The Head of Security told him to delete that line and alter the other line to say I saw someone on the golfcourse I recognized as Eddie Rouse.

JA: So the involuntary transfers are used as a traditional means of punishing prisoners? In your case you were moved from B.C. to New Brunswick.

ER: Ya, and I didn't know anyone east of Alberta.

JA: What do you think of the Family Visiting Program?

ER: I think it is good for trying to maintain balance and contact with people on the outside. At the same time I'm against the way it is presently set up. It is discriminatory against people doing life or very long sentences. If someone comes in with forty years, there's no way he will see the street before 13 of them, if he ever does. The way it is set up now the person has to prove a common-law relationship of six months duration prior to incarceration or he has to get married. People don't always want to get married because of certain beliefs.

JA: And with that 16 or 17 year old who comes in with a 25 year minimum, how is he going to prove any prior common-law relationship?

ER: It's impossible. There's no way he can. Whatever relationship he had before he came in are gone, whether by choice or by force. The amount of time you're inside and the other person outside is going to destroy it anyways. And say a guy with a long sentence meets somebody and then they get along quite well and for all intents and purposes they seem compatible — but only on one level — a level where there are always people around. They are prevented from using this Private Family Visiting program, from having this closer personal relationship, whether it be sexual or just sitting there and talking, or holding each other without even speaking.

JA: Well the Correction Services says that the Private Family Visiting program was created specifically for lifers and long-term prisoners.

ER: But that's not who is using it. The majority who use it are guys just coming in with short sentences and people eligible for TAs (Temporary Absences), day paroles etc., who the Parole Board isn't giving those passes, so in lieu of passes they get PFVs.

JA: A piece-off so they're not too frustrated.

ER: Another carrot to keep them calm and not raise any shit. But that doesn't do anything good for the lifer. It takes care of some frustration.

JA: Sexual?

ER: Ya, but it can cause other problems: a person might not be able to come to terms with another person really close to the them after he has been in for a long time. I, myself, have buried my feelings for anything — whatever feelings I did let out were really guarded. You tend to do that. It becomes an automatic reaction.

JA: Can you bury them for that long and not lose them; or not have the quality suffer?

ER: Jesus, that's a hard question to answer. Some damage would occur. I think that as long as a person keeps it in his mind that it is only a temporary thing — he can't let himself get calloused by the system or fucked up psychologically so that he wants to kill himself or kill everyone — then you'll be OK. The mistake a lot of people who are doing long time is that they cut off any contact whatsoever and they go into depression or non-communication and after a while they can't communicate with people. They have to keep communicating.

JA: If an individual had trouble communicating on the street, and that may have been part of the reason that they got in trouble, by the time that they do all this time in prison they will be absolutely unable to communicate.

ER: Or only be able to communicate in a violent manner.

JA: There is the economic question too. If there are economic hard times outside for people who have job experience and are on the spot to respond to the changing job situation, how is an ex-convict with 10 or 15 years continuous prison experience going to compete in the job market? And what will his expectations be after such a long barren time? How is he going to stay legal? And make it?

ER: They can't; they're reduced to going into labourer jobs.

JA: You've kept up with different ex-cons' situations?

ER: The only trades that a person was able to use were autobody and office skills. But the offices skills you learn in here are negligible because most offices are being computerized. The welding trade and machinery are all done by computer. What's left? If technology keeps going as it is autobody will be just throw away parts. With new cars today, everything is built modularly. If a dent is in one part, they just take that part off and throw it away and put on a new one. All color coded. In that sense the prison autobody experience will be out the window.

JA: So would you say that people do not get realistic job experience in prison?

ER: No, they don't. It is impossible because of the regimentation, and there's no stimulation in here unless you stimulate yourself by going into the university program but then not every prison has a university program. So you end up taking correspondence courses, but you can't get realistic job training from them. And when you go out and apply for a job as a welder or in some foundry, the guy is going to ask: where's your certification and you show him your Province of B.C. piece of paper and he'll ask, where did you get this? "I just got out of jail."

JA: I don't think there are any lifers at all working in industrial shops. Usually the lifers have make-work jobs like sweeping the walkway, or tier cleaner or some office job where they just sit — well, they have some kind of responsibility but it seems really to be a retreat more than any kind of serious interest.

ER: Well ya. A 10 or 15 year lifer could go through every vocational shop in this place and still have five years left on his sentence before being eligible for parole. And those skills that he has learned may be somehow useful outside and they may be not.

JA: But isn't there a sense that these guys just lose interest. They don't want to think about what they'll be doing two years or five years from now, because then they have to start looking at the whole idea of the future — what's really happening. It's a very day to day existence.

ER: Basically you can't make plans for what you will do from month to month that will build up to a point where you can say I'll be getting out a few months after that so if I do things in this sequence I'll be ready to get out. A person doing four or five years can do that. With life a guy can only say: Well, it's 1985 now and I'm looking at 1995. That's a lot of the reason that they go at things and existence on a day to day basis, retreating into some menial work where they don't have to do too much or think too hard. Just be by themselves and sit around and bullshit.

JA: Weren't you removed from Mission Prison because of public advocacy about the bugging of the prisoner's visiting room?

ER: Yes. I was at Mission two weeks and during that time they were putting microphone tables into the visiting room. When they started Open Visiting in the mid-seventies, they made a big deal out of it after the B.C. Pen Riot in 1978, that at last here was a more humanized visiting program where the visitors and the prisoners could touch each other without a glasswall and they could communi-

cate on a more personal level without having to worry about the guards listening to them all the time. So I wrote an article condemning the use of the tables and informing the prisoners of what I perceived to be the results, what info gathered off these microphones would be used for and where it would be going — the RCMP. The warden at that time (Scissons) denied that the info gathered off the microphone tables would be going to the RCMP. He said that it would be kept purely confidential.

JA: Right!

ER: Ya, I was sent back to Kent Maximum Security Prison for “negatively trying to influence the population.”

JA: In other words exercising your freedom of speech. For you to do that was particularly risky with the kind of indefinite sentence that you have.

ER: But it's a matter of whether you want to be straight with your sense of integrity. If you feel strong enough to handle it, then you can do it. If you can push the carrots aside, you will be able to speak out. If you want carrots, you'll sell out.

JA: Would you say that there is a carefully thought out pleasure or pain behavioural control system that is operating here.

ER: Sure, cutting off visits, or you could be charged with contraband, have your cell ripped apart three times a day, then they come up with the bogus contraband charge — something that could have been in your cell the whole time you were there, then suddenly it becomes illegal.

JA: Because of the position you took.

ER: Ya.

JA: Have you noticed a change in the past ten years in the penitentiary system, in terms of this behav-mod stuff?

ER: Ya, there are a lot more perks. The penitentiary system will tell you it is a more humanistic approach but if you look at the underlying factor, the end is behavior-modification. Twenty years ago you had physical punishment — they didn't play head games with you. It's changed; now its a psychological game. If they can't break that psychological wall you've built up to keep them out, they'll try to go by it by taking another route. They'll use your family because it is the one thing that is sacred. It is the only thing that you have that helps maintain your sanity. Your family can be subjected to arbitrary skin frisks, on the “basis of information received”, a kite thrown in for example (a kite is an unsigned note). It could say that this person is having drugs smuggled in by his visitors. As a result your visitors are

hit with a naked body search, because of some asshole who hasn't got the guts to face you. In theory you're supposed to have the right to face your accuser, but they'll deny you that right by saying that they have to protect your informants. Or they'll tell you that the information came from the outside. Well who the hell is going to be worrying about you on the outside after ten years!

JA: So this manipulation of your family is meant to weaken your resolve?

ER: Ya.

JA: Do you notice any difference in the length of sentences now from those of a decade ago.

ER: An AR or a straight robbery, fifteen years ago, a person was doing a large sentence is if he was doing over five years. Now ten years is looked upon as short time because people are coming in with fifteen and twenty year definite sentences for the same crimes.

JA: Under the old system how much time did you actually serve on a five year sentence?

ER: If he flattened out his time he would do three years and four months, with good time off. Then he was released and that was it. He could take off and go live his life in some other part of the country, no chains attached. In the seventies they implemented Mandatory Supervision so that if a person flattened out a five year sentence he still had another one year and eight month to do on MS on the street. And the result is that the chain is still on — the Parole Board tell him where he can work and live and he has to report, or go back to jail.

JA: So actually sentences have increased in length and after you are released you are still under intense supervision. Does this work?

ER: No!

JA: What do you think of the idea of establishing penal kibbutzes or colonies up north. There was a suggestion for lifers in an area near the Queen Charlotte Islands.

ER: Penal colonies would work to a certain extent, but you couldn't run it like a prison; you would have to let people be self-sufficient. The families of people who would want to come live with them would have to be extended the opportunity to work too. People would have to be able to run a business.

JA: The suggestion was that they would simply start a community in some isolated area. Prisoners' families would live with them and presumably they would work and live up there until their sentences were over, a sort of distant exile.

ER: That would work to a certain extent but you would have to

worry and control who was being placed in there. Because you could have some psychotic son of a bitch and then he goes off the deep end and ends up killing everybody.

JA: That would present a problem. Who polices the penal colony? The question is: Is this an idealistic vision which is impossible in the regimented mind-set of Corrections Canada, or is it a realistic alternative?

ER: No, it's not realistic because CSC wants to have control; they want to have control over every aspect of a person's life. The penal colony concept is successful down in Mexico; they have an island off the coast with two different communities on it: one for the single men and the other for men with families. It works quite well; the boat comes weekly and the women go into town for shopping and they bring back what supplies are needed. They grow food there, raise animals and they have their families with them.

JA: It sounds like a more civilized alternative that the current projection of an endless series of maximum security prisons stretching into the future. What a world vision that is!

ER: It is costing the government fifty or sixty thousand a year to keep a person in medium security. And there is a cost of keeping him afterwards, if the person is unable to find work and becomes a burden on the welfare system, and if he gets sick of welfare then he'll go back to crime. The penal colony would nurture responsibility.

JA: That would be a nice change. To shift the topic, what do you think about capital punishment.

ER: There is only a small percentage of those doing life for murder who deserve to be killed.

JA: What criteria would you use to decide who deserves to be killed?

ER: People keep bring up Clifford Olson [mass sex murderer of children]. Types like that. So having capital punishment sounds ludicrous because the number of people that fall into that category is so very few. There are more dangerous people out on the street in positions of authority who should have capital punishment levied against them, yet these people are upstanding citizens.

JA: What kind of people?

ER: Well, the Police, politicians, business people. Christ, there are high ranking businessmen who are a lot more dangerous than anyone in here because they have the money to go out and harm other human beings without getting their hands dirty.

JA: For example?

ER: Chemical company executives. Look into any branch of government. If the RCMP felt threatened, what's to say that they wouldn't go out and knock somebody off. How would you ever find out about it? They are the ones who are enforcing the law and investigating the crime; who is better placed to cover it up? Christ, they planted bombs in Quebec; they kidnapped people and nothing ever happened to them. What's to say that in the course of planting bombs, setting fires and busting into offices of legitimate political parties that they didn't somewhere kill a few people and blame it on persons unknown or frame it up as accidents.

JA: You certainly could make those conclusions quite easily. There has been mention that there were far fewer people getting convicted of first degree murder when there was a death penalty.

ER: Because the juries have their conscience to live with. Because if at some point in time they find out that this guy wasn't guilty, well they have had this guy killed; whereas if he is stuck inside for twenty-five years, ah, so what! — the guy will get out one of these days — we don't have to worry about it. The guy's not dead: in the sense of being dead bodily, but spiritually and mentally he is dead; he's buried in tons of cement.

JA: So it is easier to convict a man when you know that you are not sentencing him to death.

ER: People have a thing about not killing somebody.

I Want To Put It Down

I want to put it down
about the animal
that burrowed its way
under my back porch,
but there's not really much
to say: simply, some animal
fearing winter's approach,
the season of Death,
has tried to find shelter,
and I, half in my stupid
human fear and half
in my pride of possession,
have sealed him out
so ingeniously with my boards and shovel

then gone inside
to be out of the cold,
quite proud of myself.

Rob Cardinal, William Head Prison

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE WATSON

Age: 55

Sentence: 33 years

Crime: Armed robbery

Time served: 20 years

Interviewed by Tom Elton, William Head Prison.

TE: I don't believe that one can rightly talk about long term sentencing without dealing with the National Parole Board. So, what is your personal opinion of the N.P.B.?

GW: They're the perfect example of what Lord Acton was talking about when he said, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Besides being corrupt, I would say they are the most incompetent administrative body that exists. They are all beneficiaries of the Liberal Party patronage and I don't think they are capable of deciding whether garbage should be burned or buried. They circumvent the law and the chairman, Outerbridge, is a criminal himself. He was convicted of Contempt of Court and fined \$5,000.

TE: You say the N.P.B. circumvents the law. What do you mean by that?

GW: Ok, "gating" [a manoeuvre by which the N.P.B. would arrange a technical violation of parole minutes after a prisoner was released, by law, on Mandatory Supervision — i.e., "at the gate"]. Even when various Provincial Courts ruled "gating" illegal, the parole board continued to use gating until the Supreme Court of Canada ruled it illegal.

If you are rich and have influence the parole board will fall all over themselves giving you a parole, but if you are poor and without influence, dig in because you are going to serve all of your sentence. Personally, I detest them. I only have a little over three years to serve on a 33 year sentence and the last time I appeared before them, I told them to take a long walk on a short pier. It takes two to play a game and I called the game to a halt. If I really stated my feelings about the parole board I don't think this interview could be printed because of the obscenities.

TE: How many times have you gone before the N.P.B. and what

were those times like?

GW: I'm in my twentieth year of my sentence so I guess I've appeared before them at least a dozen times. I've had numerous job offers, a family waiting for me, plenty of community support (I even had a petition from the people in my neighbourhood requesting I be released) and it all amounted to nothing. All I heard was how dangerous I was, how violent I was and how I still represented a threat to society.

TE: What about the violence. Were any of the robberies actually violent — and by that I mean did you or your partners hurt anyone during them?

GW: I never hurt anyone when I was robbing banks and if I'm violent, how come I haven't done anything violent in prison during the *past twenty years*? They never explained to me why they paroled my co-accused over fifteen years ago, and after he violated his parole they paroled him two more times.

TE: Recently there have been a number of decisions handed down by the Federal Court re N.P.B. edicts and procedures. What do these decisions mean in respect to prisoner's rights, the procedure/legalities the N.P.B. has to follow, the overall changing movement of the N.P.B., and the cost/benefit to the prisoner applying for parole?

GW: Under the Charter of Rights, the parole board has been getting its comeuppance. For example, the parole board would only send two members to hear a case regardless of how many votes a prisoner required to be paroled. If the prisoner required more than two votes (all prisoners serving a sentence of five years or more required more than two votes) the deciding votes would be cast by members that weren't present at the hearing — the prisoner would receive a "paper decision." The courts have ruled that hearings of this type, i.e. paper decisions made by people who weren't present, are a denial of fundamental justice.

As to procedures, prior to a prisoner entering the room for a parole hearing, his case management team would talk over the case with the parole board. But now the courts have ruled the prisoner is to be present throughout the entire hearing and the Case Management team can't meet with the board until the prisoner is present. Another ruling prevents the parole board from revoking a prisoner's parole without giving him a hearing if he wants one.

TE: So you see some big changes in the operations of the N.P.B.?

GW: I don't want to exaggerate, but I personally believe the entire parole proceedings could be changed if enough prisoners fought the board under the Charter. I've studied the Parole Act, Regulations

and the N.P.B. Policy and Procedures Manual and the parole board are not obeying their own rules or following their own policies. They continuously circumvent the law. Unfortunately, most prisoners don't realize they do have rights or what those rights are. So when they appear before the parole board they just get steam-rolled, and they just accept it.

The parole board has to be fought in the courts because they are continuously being given more power by Parliament and they are continuously abusing it. The parole board returns approximately 1,000 people to prison each year for violating a condition of either their full parole, day parole or mandatory supervision. I'm not talking about committing new crimes; I'm talking about violations of conditions, i.e. going for a drink, leaving a twenty-five mile radius, etc. and it's going to get a lot worse.

TE: Over the years I've watched people return to prison four or five times for violation of mandatory supervision. Most of the citizens think that M.S. is parole, right?

GW: With mandatory supervision prisoners might as well take a parole if they are offered one because they are going to have to abide by the same conditions on M.S. as they would if they went out on parole. I don't follow my own advice because I think the N.P.B. are all a bunch of bastards and I refuse to go through anymore of their bullshit. I despise the parole board and their policies so much that I have a hard time keeping cool when talking about them. Prisoners are going to be in for a rough ride if they don't start taking the parole board to court and fighting them. That fascist, Kaplan, when he was Solicitor General, had a bunch of new proposals for tightening parole; and now, the new Solicitor General, Elmer McKay, is introducing Kaplan's proposals without even knowing what he's doing. The most dangerous person in Canada was Kaplan; he turned Canada into a police state.

TE: Ok, mandatory supervision is defined as what?

GW: A prisoner can earn one-third of his sentence off by means of remission. He can earn fifteen days for every thirty days he serves. This remission is for applying oneself, to the best of your ability, to your work, and also for good behaviour. Prior to August 1, 1970, a prisoner served his sentence less his earned remission and then was set completely free. There was a large prison building project going on and so-called "experts" predicted that prison populations would expand but released prisoners weren't cooperating — they were staying on the street — and prison officials found themselves with a lot of empty space, so when M.S. was introduced the parole board helped fill these empty cells.

TE: In effect, you don't really earn anything for obeying rules and regulations then. Where once you were granted time off, now you just have the conditions of confinement altered somewhat?

GW: Since August 1, 1970, prisoners released from prison had to serve the earned remission portion of their sentence under the authority of the parole service. They have the same rules and restrictions applied to them as they would if they were paroled. Naturally, prisoners resent M.S. They feel that they didn't receive anything from the parole board so why should they have to obey any of the regulations the parole service imposes? The prisoners have earned their release; they have served their sentence. The parole service returns over a 1,000 prisoners a year to federal prisons for violating their M.S. This costs millions of dollars to taxpayers, not for breaking the law but for violating a rule. The public hasn't a clue what M.S. means. The media call it "mandatory parole" so the public think prisoners on M.S. are parolees.

TE: Does M.S. have a logical, legal place in the supervision of released prisoners?

GW: Naturally, because Parliament has made it law. It is legal, but it is just about the most insidious piece of legislation ever passed. If, and I emphasize the word, "if", there was ever any intention to use M.S. to help the released prisoner or, to use their word, "rehabilitate" the prisoner, this intention was never acted upon. M.S. is strictly for supervision and this supervision per se, is to enforce rules and conditions against the prisoner — there has never been any attempt to help the ex-prisoner.

TE: You have mentioned to me on a number of occasions that, in your opinion, all N.P.B. proclamations made by the Chairman, William Outerbridge, since 1979 are illegal. What makes you say that, and, if true, is there something being done about it?

GW: The Parole Act, Chapter P-2, Section 3 under the title "Board Established," (1) states:

"There shall be a board, to be known as the National Parole Board, consisting of not more than twenty-six members to be appointed by the Governor in Council to hold office during good behaviour for a period not exceeding ten years."

I wrote to the Solicitor General and pointed out that Outerbridge has been on the parole board for over sixteen years. Hell, he's been Chairman going on into his thirteenth year, and I also asked him if being convicted of Contempt of Court and fined \$5,000 was a example of "good behaviour." If the law means anything, then Outer-

bridge has sat on the board illegally for the past six years and anything that he has laid down pertaining to policies and procedures should be ruled to have no force or effect.

TE: Any answer to the letter you wrote to the Solicitor General?

GW: Not yet. However, I'll find out if I'm correct soon because I'm filing a writ in Federal Court and one of the points I am going to request a ruling on is whether Outerbridge is holding his office illegally.

TE: Most prisoners seem to walk into N.P.B. hearings without advocates or assistants, unaware of the policies and procedure and ignorant of their rights. What do you think about having an independent — paid — advocate from each community to attend all parole hearings?

GW: I think it's a good idea. It took a long time for prisoners to be given the right to have someone appear before the parole board with them, and many prisoners don't take advantage of it. Despite Hollywood's portrayal of convicts, the truth is that many prisoners are overwhelmed when they appear before the board or any other authoritative board. They can't express themselves in a persuasive manner and they need help. Besides, the parole board attacks the prisoner and if doesn't have someone with him, they have a field day. They say and do whatever they want. A paid advocate would be excellent for everyone that doesn't have a wife, mother, etc. to appear with him. The advocate mustn't be connected in any way with the government!

Another thing that is very, very important that should be made law is that the parole board should be made to tape record every hearing. The only record presently made is the parole board's comments on why they denied or granted parole. But there isn't a full record of the proceedings made. If parole hearings were taped, I guarantee they'd have to change many of their ways.

TE: As long as there are prisons there are going to be parole boards. People do get out. Have you got any suggestions on how a workable parole board could be created?

GW: As long as parole board members are appointed solely on the basis of receiving a reward for their political affiliation, a workable parole board can never be achieved. We don't need a parole board. The board should be abolished. It should be replaced by automatic parole.

TE: Shorter sentences and no M.S. or paroles: you do your time and you're free?

GW: Yes. There isn't a judge in this country that doesn't take into

consideration the fact that a person might receive a parole when he sentences a person to prison. They make the sentences longer because of the prospect of a person being paroled. But less than forty per cent of prisoners are paroled.

TE: What about the effect this would cause in the prisons, no carrots to dangle in front of prisoners, and what would no paroles mean in regards to lifers?

GW: If, when a prisoner is eligible for a full parole, he was automatically paroled, it would not only give the prisoner some hope, it would also erase the violence that exists in prisons today. What prisoner wouldn't obey the rules and regulations in prison if they knew that, by doing so, they would receive a parole? Every prisoner would serve one-third of their sentence in prison, one-third on full parole and the remainder (God forbid) on mandatory supervision. Every prisoner would be treated in the same manner; there wouldn't be anymore preferential treatment for "privileged" inmates; everyone would be treated the same.

TE: What about the people who want to remain outlaws?

GW: If a prisoner screwed up, he would be returned to prison and have to serve the remainder of his sentence without further parole. But everyone would receive his one chance.

TE: And lifers?

GW: Those convicted of second degree murder would be paroled after serving seven years, and those serving a sentence for first degree murder would be paroled after ten years. A person is sent to prison for breaking the law; he can't change that fact; he has to be judged on what he has done while he is imprisoned. To tell someone, "you were bad in 1960 or 1974; therefore, we aren't going to give you a parole" is idiotic.

TE: Is it safe to assume that you think the N.P.B. has caused more harm than good?

GW: Absolutely. The National Parole Board, in the majority of cases, has caused more damage to prisoners and their families than the prisoners caused in getting sent to prison in the first place. If the public ever discovered just how the parole board operates they'd demand that the board be fired — not because the public cares so much about prisoners — but because the board is a complete waste of money.

On Quarantine Bay

While the undulating darkness sings softly
over the rocks below,
I stand at the shore, listening.

Across the straight of Juan de Fuca Port Angeles flickers
its string of coloured lights
at the bottom of the Olympian mountains.
And now, as the sun begins its swing,
the first streaks of dawn
merge into the gray band of the sky.

Behind me, the graveyard calls me from the shore.
Crows take their heads from under protecting wings.
Their voices shatter the quiet.
I step over the white rail fence
and into the cemetery.

I read the names as I walk between the rows.
I dispense identities like a god,
knowing no real distinctions are possible
among these bodies laid to rest and,
years later, falsely marked with cement bordered graves
and knee-high crosses white
against the still gray air.

I voice the dates of the deaths,
a part of the ritual invocation for
the history of these men — six
of the eighty-five thousand — conscripted
on Hong Kong's crowded streets in 1917
and brought here to the Station to be held

for shipment to France
as war labourers.

Farther down, two headstones rise
at the base of a sugarpine — silent testimony
to the fact of Canadian involvement
in the Russian revolution,
and to the lethal Russian blackpox
that recognized no battle lines,
borders, class or the colour of skin.

I stop at the pine's foot
as morning filters down through the boughs,
subtle shades in this black/white prison.
All around me the crosses
reach, as if saplings
and this the first growth from gravepods.

Time has no weight here.
There is only a sense of its passage:
seventy year old graves,
gray oaks rotting outward from the heartwood,
the crosses aging
as the day stretches across the grass.

I think of the symbolic burial
I held late last summer, when I stood
beside one of the empty graves here
in the waning August evening light,
laying something loved to rest.
Before that ceremony and tradition
the clamouring inner voices gave way
to the symmetry of birdsong, to a deeper necessity,
the sea's scent on the breeze.

Now, a siren wails incessantly
calling us to work.
Reluctantly, I walk back
to a present filled with wars, deaths and loves,

back to a world where people live

to the tunes of military marches
or a siren's singular scream.

Tom Elton, William Head Prison

INTERVIEW WITH MYLES SARTOR

Age: 29

Sentence: Life

Crime: Second degree murder Time served: 11 years, paroled

Interviewed by Tom Elton, William Head Prison.

TE: Had you ever been in prison before the murder?

MS: Yes. I guess you'd call me an institutional child. I grew up in foster homes, group homes, juvenile joints, and then provincial and federal prisons.

TE: Ok, looking back on that now, what seems to have been the problem?

MS: Well, the home broke up — divorce and all that. I went to live with my mother and step-father, but hated my step-father. There was lots of verbal and physical violence directed at me. I got into trouble to fight back. It was the only way to hurt him.

TE: And that led you to?

MS: At first they ran the "shrink" trip on me, private sessions and group therapy. Then I was put into one of the public school's "exceptional classes" for disturbed children. Needless to say I felt I didn't fit it.

TE: Like making the problem worse, huh?

MS: Yeah. After that I went to live with my grandfather. We got along well. I stayed with him until I turned eleven and then, because I was showing I had learned some calmness, I was taken from my grandfather and placed back with my mother and step-father.

TE: But the initial problem, your step-father, still remained.

MS: Right. He felt he had failed and that came out in his actions towards me. There was a lot of animosity thrown my way.

TE: What kinds of crime did you start with?

MS: I started with break-and-entries. They were easy and I liked the excitement generated during the "score." And then, when I got

caught, I realized I'd really gotten to my step-father. I'd hurt his respectable reputation. I was fifteen. All of this led to my being classified as "unmanagable" and subsequently put into a Training School. I was there for a year and then released back into my parents' care.

TE: And you reverted back to the old patterns?

MS: Actually, no. I fell in love and started to straighten myself out. However, I spent most of my time with my girl. I worked a bit, but stayed out late or all night with my girlfriend. The love affair was seen as a threat by my parents. They felt I should've been at home more, and that I wasn't listening to anything they had to say. So they turned me in and I found myself before the Court again for being "unmanagable."

TE: What happened then?

MS: I went back inside, but got out fairly quickly. I figured it would be much the same if I returned home so I went to Alberta instead. That's where I got my first criminal conviction. Within a month I had been set up for trafficking in M.D.A. I got bail on the charge, and then returned to B & Es to support myself. I ended up with two years less a day for the trafficking charge.

TE: How old were you and where did you do the "deuce-less"?

MS: I was eighteen and served the time in Spy Hill — a provincial prison.

TE: Did you have any problems during that time because of your age.

MS: Some, not too many. I knew most of the ropes from serving time in Training School.

TE: Ok, so how long were you out before you got your next conviction.

MS: Four days. I was pinched for second degree murder. All I really want to say about that is I was out partying, catching up for lost time, and robbed the gas station for money. It didn't go like it was supposed to and a sixteen year old kid got killed.

TE: Seems like a lot of people return to prison because they "catch up".

MS: Yeah.

TE: How did you feel when you first walked into a federal penitentiary with a life sentence?

MS: Scared. I was just about nineteen then. It was lunch time when I was brought into P.A. (Prince Albert Institution) and all of us "fish"

were herded through the main dome. I stood down there on the floor waiting for my cell effects. There were people all over the place — on the floor, on the stairs, up on the tiers — and they were all yelling at me, telling me to get on their tier, etc. I was young, blond, and weighed about a hundred and thirty pounds. When people started to whistle at me I got scared.

TE: So how did you get through the first two years?

MS: Drugs. Most of the time I was blitzed.

TE: Did you have any serious problems with anybody because of your looks and age?

MS: Yeah, once. One guy told me I should go into protective custody — either that or become his “kid.” I realized I could be either of two things, a punk or somebody’s kid. Fortunately, there were a couple of people in P.A. that I did know. I asked them to get me a “shank.” Having just gotten a life sentence I figured nothing more could be done to me, legally. But the people I asked for the knife took it on their own to go and see the guy. They told him to pull up and that ended the problem.

TE: Did you think that during that time you might get yourself killed?

MS: I didn’t care about that once I’d made my decision. There were lots of hassles between the natives and whites back then. People were getting killed or hurt all the time. I just went with it. If I got killed, so what? I think I had a bit of a death-wish then too, and that also caused me a few problems.

TE: Having come to your decision, and knowing you could be killed did what to you?

MS: I lost all sense of fear. I was high most of the time and just didn’t care. If people were going to hassle me they were going to pay for it.

TE: Ok, you were transfered from P.A. to B.C.P. (British Columbia Penitentiary). When?

MS: In 1976. I was transferred for a “regional displacement” because I got pinched with some escape tools and drugs. They figured I was getting too settled and was becoming a threat.

TE: Were you “kidnapped”?

MS: Yes. I was just grabbed, handcuffed, shackled and put on an airplane with some other people. All my friends and the family I cared about were back east. I didn’t know where I was being taken until I got there.

TE: You arrived at the B.C. Pen just after the riot, didn't you?

MS: Yes. There wasn't much happening in the place at the time. Most of the guys were still locked down. I was put into a cell on the B side of the East Wing. The cell was smashed and the wing windows hadn't been replaced — snow and wind were billowing in through the windows.

TE: You became involved in the school programme about that time, didn't you?

MS: I didn't feel like doing any of the manual labour stuff, and some of the guys on my tier were in the university programme. They talked me into giving it a try. I challenged my G.E.D. and passed, and then I enrolled in the UVic programme.

TE: And you stayed with it?

MS: Yeah. I found it a good escape from everything around me and it was opening up my mind as well. I stuck with it at B.C. Pen for eighteen months, and then I got a transfer to Matsqui so I could take third and fourth year courses.

TE: Did you find that during the time you were involved with courses you did a lot of introspective searching?

MS: Yeah. I started taking long hard looks at myself and my place in this world. The work involved in the courses taught me a lot about self-control, and how to utilize that to my advantage.

TE: So you came up with a philosophy of self or something, and that help you do the time?

MS: Basically. I found that a lot of my troubles stemmed from my role models — they weren't so hot and I found I was a lot better than most of them.

TE: And?

MS: I dropped them all. I immersed myself in my books and studies. And that wasn't as simple as it sounds. I found myself going from one extreme to the other, being a Hegelian on one hand and a Marxist on the other. What I read I became; however, the intellectual history and psychology courses did take hold. The most important discovery for me was finding out how people think and why they think like they do.

TE: Let's talk about long-term sentencing. It's becoming common practice these days for judges to hand out double digit sentences. Having spent eleven years inside, what do you think about this?

MS: It's nuts. Sentencing someone to, say, a 25 year minimum, contradicts reason. Each person reacts to their sentence differently,

will mature differently. Benefits have to be seen on a personal level — a certain amount of time may be beneficial but any time over that will be detrimental. There has to be hope, without hope there is nothing.

TE: At the moment there are approximately 500 people serving life sentences in this country. Many more are serving terms ranging from fifteen to thirty years. Prisons are, to use the old term, warehouses. Getting out is not an easy task. What kinds of problems with the N.P.B. (National Parole Board) and prison staff have you seen over the years?

MS: First, there's an obvious paradox. You don't get out if you aren't honest, confess. But honesty is used against you; so you don't tell them the truth. We give them stereotypes which in turn protect us. So they never get to see the real person, don't know what they can do to help a person if a person really does need help. You aren't going to hand someone that can hurt you your weaknesses. It's a viable fear.

TE: So what they get are created — predicable — identities. Predictability isn't something one fears.

MS: Exactly. And because of that they can never know when the moment of real change takes place and can be built on. The moment where actual habilitation could take place slips by. And then, usually, you start to see the system as detrimental.

TE: Coupled with that you have the antagonistic exchanges between prisoner and guards, and between security guards and Living Unit guards.

MS: Everyone is working for progression at the expense of the others. We try to use them to get out, and they use us and each other to get promotions.

TE: Psychological warfare.

MS: Yes, and the negative effects are not only limited to the prisoners. They suffer the burnouts too. Take the case of D. and R. for example. When D. started working here she was ok, honest and willing to do what she could or thought was right. She did more for R. in a few months than anyone else had during a seven year period. Other guards noticed that D. and R. were doing well and they figured there was more to it than simple case work. They started to put pressure on her and after a while she slacked off, starting to go with the flow.

TE: That seems to be the rule rather than the exception. In Milhaven, guards who were seen as being "too friendly with prisoners" suffered at the hands of what the Swackhammer Report called the

"Millhaven Mafia." The friendlies had their car tires slashed, families threatened, and were even beat up in the prison parking lots when they came off shift.

MS: Things like that aren't limited to Millhaven.

TE: What about the build-up of people serving heavy time. What do you foresee happening inside prisons in the years ahead?

MS: People are going to emotionally stagnate and there's going to be a high degree of learned helplessness.

TE: I've felt the effects of learned helplessness. When I go out on passes it's a task to simply walk into a store and buy something.

MS: Yeah. We all feel that. And there isn't much being done to solve the problem before a person is actually confronted with it. If you warehouse someone from the age of eighteen until they are fifty they aren't going to do much when they do get out except hide in a room. When I got out to the half-way house I see people who haven't got anywhere to go, they don't know anyone, and they don't know how to get past their own inhibitions.

TE: So what do you recommend?

MS: Something like a two-way alternative community with families, perhaps up North. It should be where people could be together and live normal lives: work, support their family, pay taxes, etc. That with a movement radius of sixty miles or so would allow a person to retain a sense of normality.

TE: Something like that was being batted around Parliament before the federal elections, an alternative community on an island back east. But that was strictly for lifers.

MS: Except it would have to be co-ed, with counselling groups and things like that, whatever was needed and wanted. They'd retain their self-confidence, mature emotionally, and there'd be no real deep rooted sense of alienation.

TE: Ok, let's talk about something more immediate. What could be implemented right now to relieve people of prison-after-shock?

MS: Create earlier release programs. The maximum amount of time a person should have to serve is from three to five years, and from that a movement into a socialization and work release program. The effects of displacement won't be so great.

TE: That means shorter sentences and possibly more escapes?

MS: Sure, you're going to have some escapes. But if enough freedom is given I don't think there'd be too many. In the long term it would work. The recidivism rate for lifers, for example, is less than .002%. Few of the lifers released run.

TE: So what you're saying is that sentences should be reduced and a more viable release system worked out to ease people back into the community. This plan can apply to people serving moderately short definite sentences but what about the lifer?

MS: The sentencing there has to be changed as well. To be realistic, let's say a life sentence should be five minimum and life maximum. Let a person's progress dictate terms and times of release.

TE: Back to the psychologists. It's becoming a too common practice for people in a no-win situation to be forced into different therapy programs. The standard joke these days is that if you don't have a problem, get one. The faster you're "cured" the quicker you get out.

MS: It doesn't have to be that way. Some people might need counselling to figure out the basics of themselves. Others, of course, wouldn't need it. The area of "help" too has to change. Rather work on "problems" which may or may not be real. The direction has to be turned towards the basics.

TE: You mean things other than alcoholism, drug abuse, etc.?

MS: Yes, like understanding and dealing with the socio-economic conditions.

TE: What about juvenile offenders and young adults, the creation of patterns and such?

MS: Sending young people to prison is just a waste of time. It takes years out of a life and gives nothing positive in return. There should be more emphasis put on community work and things like that. Get the kids away from their role models and give them new ones. If you want to scare a young adult give them a two year sentence in a maximum security prison. But only do that after every other avenue has been explored.

TE: The government today is becoming more punitive, victims' groups are banding together and no one at all is satisfied with the justice system. Do you think that having the community more involved in the legal process, say in sentencing, would help?

MS: Definitely not. Justice is defeated in the face of subjectivity.

TE: A jury — in the case of murder — is asked to recommend the minimum sentence a judge should hand down. Sometimes they're listened to, sometimes not. You don't think that people can remain objective during submissions to a judge?

MS: No, especially in the case of victims' submissions. After being victimized the normal person wouldn't remain objective. It's as simple as that.

TE: Ok, as a solution to a growing prison population that is going to explode in the future, you recommend what?

MS: Shorter sentencing, a better planned release program, alternative communities, and more emphasis placed on helping the young to break old and create new patterns. Those patterns, in the end, are our tomorrow.

Sisters of Mercy

Oh you sisters of mercy who line up to visit
in this eye of the storm,
breasted icons
we sup at the feast of your patience
your heart whipped cherubs
dive and beat like swallows on our faces
maidens wait to rescue the foundling Moses
from the surge of his male direction.

Sisters of hope who abstain outside, their beds are empty
but they glow within.
We are your eucharist
things shut up
are used again
and you are sanctified in the hot focus of our attention.

Oh select sisters, you wear no mantle of your profession
there is no written creed
save your recognition of each other's soft lines
outside the gate.
We wonder why,
when so many more accessible hosts, whose hearts would
beat beside your lips at night
are out there,
and yet
mother martyr lover saint
the youthful sister of duty resists the lights
and comes, eyes shining, soft palms open and unresisting.

While we wait,
harlequins in our sepulchers,
to rise again.

John Abbott, Matsqui Prison

THE FORGOTTEN WOMEN

They pass by unnoticed in a crowd, unless, perhaps, one has an eye for a certain indefinable sadness. They are, however, different from most women: they are the wives and lovers of men incarcerated behind penitentiary walls. They are as oppressed and imprisoned in their own fashion as the men that they love.

Today's society devotes much media coverage to its popular ailments. Drugs, alcohol, child abuse, wife battering, venereal diseases, sexual discrimination and women's rights all receive much needed attention. Countless individuals specialize in each of these fields, and while these problems still exist, vast amounts of government and private funding and inestimable labour hours are making progress in all of these areas. Prisoners themselves are often the focus for television specials and talk shows, but their women are still forgotten.

We are out here, isolated and alienated, yet still within society. There is a trend in our judicial system towards imprisoning more men for lengthier sentences, so our numbers also increase.

What does a man's life sentence mean to the woman left behind on the street? It means learning how to be strong and patient. It means fighting against the mockery that the system has created of your marriage, of your whole life. It means changing your entire manner of existence.

The majority of prisons are deliberately constructed somewhere in rural obscurity. If we hide them all the way from view, everybody will be able to forget that they're even there. The crimes, the criminals and their families, however, were generally bred of the big city, so there the wives remain. If they are employed, transfer to the country is unlikely. To visit their husbands they must find the time to fit into the prison visiting schedule and then travel expensive distances to see their spouse an average of twice a week — four hours for your marriage out of every 168 hours. If that seems an impossible situation for her, the wife can relocate to the prison area and see her husband four different days of the week for a total of ten hours.

From the marital standpoint, the latter would most certainly seem the preferable choice. But at what cost?

The government picks up this tab. They now need support not only the convict, but his wife and children. Welfare is the name of this game. Even for the educated and the skilled, the possibilities for employment in a small rural community, especially in the economic climate of today, are slim to none. And we are here for a long stay.

Since visits do not usurp much of our time, and we have no jobs, we spend much of the time at home. We are presented with the unavoidable opportunity of getting to know our neighbours. In a small prison town, where the major sources of employment are the prisons and the R.C.M.P. station, many of our neighbours are staff members from those places. The antipathy between "us" and "them" doesn't make for open warfare, but it does create a broad rift throughout the community. Definitely not an ideal residential situation, brimming over as it is with prejudice and paranoia. So we exist within our own apartment/cells — alone with our thoughts.

We have a great deal to ponder. With the initial "pinch" we began an extended trek through the stages of grief, similar to that which one experiences upon the demise of a loved one. We, too, suffer the phases of shock, denial, anger, mourning and acceptance.

The initial shock encompasses all the trauma of having your spouse forcibly and physically separated from you by a will outside of your own and his. It is a fact as irrevocable and unchangeable as death itself. Reality abruptly becomes highly unpleasant and most painfully difficult to face. The impact of this shock reveals itself in such responses as a general mental stupor, severe depression, memory dysfunction, and symptoms such as sudden bouts of the shakes. The part that is really scary, but you don't realize it until months/years later, is that you actually believe at the time that you're functioning quite satisfactorily and nearly normally.

After the major shock at the beginning is working its way through, you find the denial phase starting. You can't imagine how you will be able to cope with your husband in jail; therefore this can't possibly be occurring in your life. It simply isn't true that your husband is imprisoned, separate from you. Finally some back portion of the mind speaks up and impresses cold reality upon your conscious mind.

But it isn't right, it just isn't right! Anger flares, bright, hot and all-consuming. Your indignation and outrage (righteous or not) at how unjust a place this world is, how your life is now in such terrible turmoil, and how circumstances are so far beyond your power to change engulfs every fibre of your being. You hate, in a purer form than ever previously within your experience. Your hatred is directed everywhere: at the "system" (i.e. cops, judges, prosecutors, and even

media reporters), at every person that you encounter, at your spouse, at yourself and your god. Your applecart has not only been overturned, but enormous boots have stomped it flat, and you resent and hold everyone and everything absurdly accountable.

Eventually comes the ultimate realization that we have been the sole authors of our own fates, not mere victims of the system, and that our present positions are only the inevitable outcome of our own and our spouses' ill-considered actions.

Enter now the mourning, the soul-wrenching sadness. We grieve for all that is lost of our previous pleasures of daily existence; we shed tears for the long years to come. The future has ceased to be an optimistic prospect: it looms with empty days and wasted time. Our sorrow is for ourselves, our husbands, and for our relationships which we fear will be the next fatality in this tragic scenario. In many cases this *is* the result.

Finally, at long last, we reach the relief of acceptance. The anger and the sorrow are no longer felt with such tortuous intensity. The boggled, confused brain has now come to the bitter awareness that the repeated blows of imprisonment, conviction, sentence, and lost appeal are indeed real. Our husbands will be in prison for a very long time. If we are to continue our marriages, our entire lives will be fraught with unusual stresses and strains. And before we can have a future together with our husbands in that magical state we call freedom, we have many years of waiting ahead.

We have not existed in a vacuum on the street: husband and wife have parents, siblings, and other relatives, all of whom are affected. Their reactions in turn affect us.

A not unusual reaction for the husband's family is to view the wife as their burden-reliever. The primary support person for the man will be his wife, and many of his family may decide that they need not visit or correspond with any frequency. Their feelings of guilt are absolved by assuring themselves that his wife will "look after him." Virtual abandonment of the man by his family is a further hardship upon him and his wife.

The wife's family is less likely to be sympathetic to the man's situation. Reactions vary, but can include a stance of non-support as long as the woman remains in the relationship. This can place the woman in the untenable position of feeling compelled to make an either/or choice between her parents and her husband. Most certainly this is an impossible choice to have to make, which adds still another needless stress.

The woman is now the emotional mainstay for her husband, but she also is desperately in need of support for herself, especially at the beginning. The presence of a close friend is invaluable, someone who

is non-judgmental, patient, tolerant, who will listen but say little, and who can assist in the simple day-to-day tasks of living. Fortunately, this extremely needy stage is quite short-lived.

In an attempt to interact with people who can really understand her problems, the wife further isolates herself by associating with other "joint broads," often to the exclusion of other friendships. In seeking compassion and understanding she actually extends her feelings of alienation. Together, these women, all struggling in similar situations, can share their problems and some solutions. They can let off steam, bitch, rant and rave with women who can appreciate their frustrations. Other friends often cannot conceptualize the predicament. Within the confines of these kinds of "joint" relationships we are able to display some of our vulnerability and share our secret fears and anxieties.

First and foremost is the awful dread that one day the notification will arrive that the husband is dead. It is a fear with which we all must live, each and every day of the sentence. We hear of it happening to others, and we carry the knowledge that it can happen anytime, for any or no reason. In prison, some men kill; some men are killed. It is really very simple, and in its simplicity lies its terror.

The flip side is knowing that life inside, with the unique codes and morals of that separate reality, implies also that one day the man whom we love may be in a position where he must kill another human being. The moral and religious feelings surrounding that possibility create deep fears in themselves. On another level, we must live with the knowledge that if that possibility comes to pass, we will have to face the loss of the chance of a future parole, and the termination of all hope for a life together on the street.

Continually we fear for our husband's health. A serious injury or illness for the average citizen can rapidly become a terminal one for someone inside prison walls. Medical facilities are limited and inadequate to contend with anything of major consequence. Even if a suitable diagnosis is made in enough time, the patient is still located in a rural area. He must be "rushed" to a city centre for further treatment, battling government red tape. So we wonder: will he get there in time? Once again we can only wait helplessly.

Less dramatic, but of more day-to-day concern, is the fear that the husband may be found guilty of transgressing an institutional rule, unwittingly, unavoidably, or deliberately. He might even be charged for an offence as a result of an unearned accusation. The repercussions can be severe for us, such as being placed on screened (telephone) visits, being barred from group open house events, having Private Family Visits (P.F.V.s) cancelled or even having our husbands

transferred to another distant prison or Special Handling Unit. Our visits are privileges; they are not rights. So as they are given, so may they also be taken away. The donkey and the carrot are high-profile residents at any penal institution.

The woman fears that she, too, may contravene some rule and that that may produce the same results. Exercise of self-control and good judgment when visiting the institution and while dealing with the staff members with whom she must come in contact is critical to the continuation of her visiting privileges. She also comes into jeopardy of losing her visits should she be less than a model citizen in her "street" life. Any kind of criminal charge (prior to trial and verdict, although she may well be found innocent) will result in screened visits only, no open houses, no Private Family Visits. The woman carries considerable responsibility on her own shoulders for maintaining acceptable behavior for the continuation of the various visiting privileges.

With all the pain, stress and fear, there are some compensating times available to some of us — brief, albeit, but respites of a kind from doing time. These twilight zone periods are officially designated the Private Family Visits. Whatever we may say about them on the negative side, very few of us would willingly trade them for anything.

P.F.V.s provide an opportunity for the convict and his wife, or other members of his immediate family, to be together continuously for between 24 and 72 hours, in a relatively normal setting. In two-bedroom mobile homes, they can cook, eat, talk, play, enjoy music or television, sleep and make love. The couple can converse at any length they choose in an environment which the propaganda claims to be unmonitored. Not that they want to discuss criminal activity — past, present or future, but like all families, they prefer that certain matters remain private. Such privacy is not possible during the electronic monitoring and recording of regular visits.

In the trailer we have the precious privacy to disagree. It seems ludicrous that married adults should not be able to argue together (a psychologically healthy behavior), but when your time together is spent almost exclusively in a small visiting room with eleven or so other couples, in a setting reminiscent of a grade school classroom with several teachers omnipresent, your disagreements are of necessity so low-key as to be almost humorous. Raised voices and profane language would interfere with the visits of the other couples and would likely endanger your own visiting privileges. The P.F.V. provides the luxury of being able to do some perfectly normal yelling at your spouse.

One of the most common criticisms of the P.F.V. Programme is that sex is its only real purpose, and that if that were the case there would be something wrong about it. Family unity is the purpose of the programme, and all of the benefits for the convict, his family, and ultimately society which that can imply. But if the only reason for these visits were to enable a married couple to have sex together every two months, where is the outrage in that? These men have been convicted of crimes and are duly receiving their punishment of being removed from society and losing most of their freedom and dignity. Must they *and* their wives also forfeit the most personal sacred aspect of themselves: that is, their marriage? Even the most restrictive religions do not protest the physical unity of a man and a woman within the confines of their marital bonds.

So too, it is not an unreasonable proposition for a married couple to wish to conceive children. Many of these men and their wives would be or already are wonderful parents; making a mistake in part of their lives does not negate this possibility. There are many people out in the world who never commit a punishable crime, but who have atrocious parenting skills, who may be creating, in the youngsters of today, the criminals of tomorrow.

Yet the possibility of achieving conception with such restricted opportunities is a topic of considerable distress to those who are yet childless, but are "trying." When the man is serving a long sentence, starting a family may be a biological impossibility if the couple must wait for his release. The effect, then, of the man's incarceration, can be the particularly cruel and unusual punishment of preventing him and his wife from having any children. This may suspiciously fit some archaic model of prohibiting criminals from procreating, lest there should be some genetically-passed predisposition toward criminal activity.

Predictably enough, the judicial system plods along, much as it has for centuries, postured like the three monkey with hands over eyes, ears and mouth. People who commit crimes must be punished. So they are locked away out of sight for many years. Most will return to society eventually, yet it is still "full steam ahead" and damn the consequences of our actions, of our society's chosen form of punishment. And when they are released and commit more crimes, let's all play the game and pretend to be shocked at the astonishing recidivism rate. These bad kiddies didn't learn their lesson: through nothing but their own poor attitudes they returned to us embittered and angry. Guess all we can do is flex our judiciary muscles and return them to where they *became* bitter and angry, and we'll wait and see if it will work *this* time.

So in my lifetime and yours there will be prisons, there will be men

kept behind bars, and there will be women that they've had to leave behind. It can only become worse before it could ever become better. These men, as all enlightened people are quite aware, are not animals. They are products of our society and symptoms of its failure. Certainly, they have made their own poor choices, but they are not the only ones who suffer.

Out of respect for the privacy and dignity of the individuals involved, I have de-personalized the examples herein. This is not a chronology of my own experiences, although I have shared in many of them. I have had considerable amounts of contact and discussion with many convicts' wives, and I have heard many of the sad tales of their specific struggles.

My mother often told me, "It's better to laugh than to cry." If I shed a tear for every pain of my present situation, I would be unable to continue with my marriage, perhaps even with my life. We hold tightly to what good times we can still have, and treasure our pleasant memories from the past. We pray for a future, and cling tenaciously to the faith that there will be a happy one for us. I need to be strong, and for my marriage to survive, I must weather these times as best I can as I value my marriage highly and love my husband dearly. I accept things as they are now for what they are. To run away from a problem rarely solves it. If I love my husband, should I not stand by him? It is sure as hell not an easy way to run a marriage, but it *is* my marriage.

I do not ask anyone to bleed for me or others like me. We all have free will which we can exercise to the degree which we choose. However, the price that we are paying is very high, and I wonder if all of these costs are necessary, fair, reasonable or even humane? We are human beings too, each of us with both positive and negative attributes. There are men in jail, but their women live quietly imprisoned within society. We have always been here, but now our numbers are increasing dramatically. We now represent a significant statistical number, but people can so easily ignore what they don't want to see.

We don't want to be forgotten.

J.E. Telfer,
A Visitor to Kent Prison,
Aggasiz.

As John Q. Sees Us

we talk some
 fuck some
 suck some
then we talk some more
 fuck and suck some more
no plot line
just a beginning, a middle,
and an end
 like some low-budget porno flick.

a mis-leading stereo-type at best
a gallows-humour absurdity,
 to be sure.

we Love some
 Communicate much
 Share more
and we repeat it all as many times
as our precious few moments
will allow.

it's not easy to pack
a whole life
into 48 hours
once every two months.

J.E. Telfer

Consequences

so They locked you away
and Time is passing
while They attempt to achieve
Their oh-so-noble goal:
They try to make of you
an average citizen
and They forget all about little me.

the more They try to socialize **you**
the less socialized **i** become
the more They try to civilize **you**
the less civilized **i** become.

the more Time passes
the more i hate, the more the anger burns
i become lonelier, colder
the bitterness grows.

and while They're not watching
while They're making you to mold
i've become the dangerous one.

J.E. Telfer

CREATING POLITICAL MAN: THE HUMANITIES IN PRISON

The Institute for the Humanities at Simon Fraser University has developed a Humanities Core Curriculum for use with adults whose educational careers have been interrupted and who have an at best ambivalent attitude toward formal education and the traditions and norms of society. The Curriculum consists of severely edited excerpts from classic and contemporary texts ranging from Plato to Dostoevsky and covering a wide area of humanistic and social inquiry.

The Curriculum addresses the general theme of "Human Nature and the Human Condition" through units focussing on topics such as: The Individual vs the State; The State vs the Individual; The Power of Language; Utopian Dreams and Nightmares; The Artistic Vision; and Man As Machine or Master. The reading material are used to demonstrate that the fears, anxieties, questions, and hopes felt by each of us are universal to humans, that others have faced them, proposed ways of dealing with them, or at least placed them in a context larger than the single self.

The Humanities Core Curriculum (HCC), was introduced into the Simon Fraser University program at Matsqui Prison in Abbotsford, British Columbia in the fall of 1984. It was meant to fulfill a variety of functions. As a non-credit pre-university course, it was to act as a bridge or a transition for the mature student who had been away from school for a long time. It would ease his approach into the formal academic world of research and writing with a regular course, emphasizing critical thought, analysis, reading, and argument, as opposed to the multiple choice world of the General Education Diploma (GED). The HCC classes used the seminar format as it provided an arena for the display of critical thought and argument, simultaneously enhancing the confidence of the prisoner-students in their verbal skills while de-emphasizing the written requirements which are usually so daunting to the beginner student.

Behind this preparatory function of the HCC and operating as its progressive, theoretical *raison d'être* was the notion of the ameliorating influence of the study of the Humanities upon criminality: the idea that the criminal's alienation from society, like that of many other sub-groups, is due in large part to insufficient acculturation. Using the formal study of the Humanities as a force for "cultural literacy", it was argued that the criminal will come to understand the reasons

for the restraint on his freedom and broaden his horizons and henceforth his ability to choose alternative methods of behavior. With this objective in mind the University chose to use other prisoners, men who had completed at least three years of university work, to be the teachers of the HCC in each of the four prisons served by Simon Fraser University. I fulfilled that role at Matsqui Prison.

This rehabilitative approach has also been put forward as a general rationale for having a university level Liberal Arts program in the prison system — and has been accepted as such by the Correctional Service of Canada. The HCC concept focuses directly on this tone of rehabilitation and as a result has found some resonance among those who designate funding in prison systems elsewhere.

The presentation of the HCC material initially revealed a number of difficulties for the teacher-initiator. The most basic problem was a widespread lack of recognition among the students of the individual selections and their authors. Aside from Carl Sagan, the TV scientist, and John Steinbeck, the popular American novelist whose novellas *The Red Pony* and *The Pearl* are included in the Canadian highschool literature curriculum, there was little common knowledge about any of the other writers and almost none about their respective works. I was initially amazed by this, but after some consideration of the interrupted nature of the students' educations (only one of my first class had graduated from high school), the lack of emphasis upon reading and writing in the high school curriculum, and the impact of television culture upon literacy, I assumed no knowledge at all and made it my duty to fill in these vast lacunae as promptly as possible.

After providing very basic chronologies of the writers and thinkers being used, I attempted to colour in the historical context in which the various ideas were being presented. It seemed almost nonsensical to introduce *Heart of Darkness* without a discussion of late 19th century imperialism, and in particular the record of Belgian oppression in the Congo. Although this selection could be read purely as an interesting case of technique or as a philosophical journey into the soul of man, such a focus would not do justice to the political subtext of the HCC or provide any real tools for the prisoner-student to use to understand more fully his or her condition.

The Political Subtext of the Humanities Core Curriculum

I believe politics are an essential part of education. Every historical evaluation possesses hidden political weight. The express purpose of the HCC is to develop the analytical and critical abilities of students so that they can discover and choose from a position of knowledge, awareness, and hence strength — instead of blindly responding to processes that they do not understand, cannot control and are there-

fore manipulative. Even in as simple a matter as reading a newspaper, the product of the current cultural tradition of political ignorance and apathy that is peculiarly North American shone through as some of my students at first repeated, like parrots, the current Reagan Administration line that the anti-nuclear peace movement is simply a KGB-financed conspiracy to disarm the West. They had no notion of the popular media as essentially a monopoly, never questioned why other viewpoints were ignored or downplayed, and never questioned the veracity of the material.

The *HCC* hopes, I believe, to arm students with visions of other ideals, other motivations, and other patterns of political relations than those based on private capital which dominate our present — above all with a vision of alternative possibilities in all dimensions of human affairs. The political subtext of the *HCC* selections is thus essentially revolutionary, though it may not be perceived as such by its creators. The net effect of immersion in this material is to overturn the belief systems of the students, belief systems which, in the case of these prisoner-students, have brought them to their current nadirs — the amoral, ruthless quest for money, the objectification of people into one-dimensional victims, the lack of concern for the ramifications of their actions — the same belief system or values of private capital, demonstrated everyday in its ruthless search for profit. It is in this sense that the *HCC* can be seen as revolutionary.

A prisoner in my class once asked me, "Why are there never any books on the labour struggle, anarchism, or class differences in high school? Why did I have to come to prison to discover this stuff?" A good question which led to a discussion of current trends in education, particularly the emphasis on science, technology, and vocational training at the expense of the Humanities. Could it be possible that apolitical engineers and technicians could be put to profitable use by big business while their political affiliations could be counted upon to be responsive to conservative sirens? We discussed this issue in the context of Carl Sagan's ideas concerning man's essential similarity to animals and Kropotkin's "scientific premise" that cooperation rather than competition is the operative source of human civilization, that man is not born with an innate appetite for personal property — that this ideology has to be learned. The broad strokes of Social Darwinism, the theory that the evolution of society works from the dynamic of "survival of the fittest" and that we are all in some bitter Hobbesian competition with one another, are all philosophical foundations acquired through education. Our education depends on the material we are exposed to, and, unfortunately, the usual scholastic curricula does not provide the student with equal exposure to different philosophical and political traditions.

The readings in the *HCC* stress cooperation over competition. They represent an idealist panorama. When I began the class I looked at each selection as an individual study, a taste of that particular writer's ideas that might whet the appetites of the students for more, and as an opportunity to discuss and appreciate different philosophical positions. But the *HCC* contains its own internal rhythm which builds through the continuing selections into a crescendo which demands radical change.

Steinbeck in *Grapes of Wrath* calls for cooperation and unity among the poor pickers and farm labourers against the system of agricultural exploitation practiced by the large landowners and their creatures, the local law enforcement officials. Thoreau tells us not to pay our taxes if those taxes go to a government which supports slavery and wages war on its neighbours. He gives us the maxim: "but if it (the law) is of such a nature that it requires you to be an agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law." Dostoevsky, in his *Notes from the Underground*, debunks the scientific positivism of the 19th century and by suggestion its spawn, the scientific pretensions of such pseudo-sciences as criminology and psychology. Kropotkin in "The Uselessness of Laws" defines the law solely as the barricade by which the rich maintain the wealth they have appropriated from everyone else and recommends the abolition of private property.

When one of the students said, "I read and hear about all of the injustice and corruption and I want to do something, but what can one person do?" he is responding to that internal rhythm, the culmination of which is a demand for change and a personal commitment to work actively for change.

The Teacher As Advocate

My role was defined by the creators of the Curriculum as that of a "neutral" facilitator of discussion rather than teacher. The objective was to maximize discussion and avoid having an authority figure dominate the class with one point of view. I did not interpret this to mean that I would adopt that false equilibrium of ideas which sometimes passes for academic objectivity. Objectivity is the realm of the non-involved. Victor Serge's Catalan workers lived in shanty towns, uneducated, ill-fed, and exploited by the large mill owners. There can be no objectivity here, no justification for wage slavery and exploitation; only excuses. I presented my views on Social Darwinism, the Protestant Work Ethic, "Free" Enterprise, and Laissez-faire capitalism, interpreting them as devices to establish cultural hegemony and rationalize inequality, exploitation, and imperialism (e.g. how Guatemalan peasants work in virtual slavery to put bana-

nas on our breakfast tables). My conclusions were ones I demonstrated to the students, hoping that they would analyze them and take them up as their own. In that respect my neutrality was a facade which was quickly seen as such and either accepted, rejected, or ignored by the students. Cognitive development is not a static illumination: it refers to the changing dynamic of the minds of humans, it does not mean acquiescence — it is the prelude to social action. Subtlety was not emphasized in my approach.

A few individuals in our class felt an effort was being made to “brainwash them with a left pinko party line.” This impression was enhanced by the presence in the group of an anarchist who was both expressive and articulate in expostulating his beliefs. My response was to have them define exactly what brainwashing meant, and then compare the amount of media information which reinforced the status quo with this thin trickle of alternative ideas presented in the *HCC* selections. I suggested that freedom of choice depended on knowing that alternatives existed and were viable. It was a small step from there to the premise that “Ignorance is Slavery.”

I made a conscious effort to present each idea as an arena of responsibility for each man in the room. The *HCC* should not be an exotic slideshow of ideas where the audience flips from one to the next, still the passive spectator being entertained. To enhance this feeling of direct involvement, I asked each prisoner to take turns reading the material aloud to the group.

Outcomes: Adaptation or Action?

Personally, I doubt that acculturation, the study of the Humanities, or graduation from the *HCC* will reduce recidivism or criminality as it is defined by the state; to the contrary, if a prisoner absorbed fully the import of the internal rhythm of the *HCC*, it would provide at the least rationalizations and at best political reasons for continuation of activity directed against the status quo, some of which might even be unlawful. It is unreasonable to think that individuals who have been prone to action in the past should “rehabilitate” themselves to a position of stationary acquiescence through education in the Humanities. If that were the outcome, it does not say much for the material they have studied.

The study of the Humanities may, however, change the essential nature and focus of such actions. For instance, a political motivation for action categorized as “criminal” may take the place of nihilistic exuberance. Instead of robbing druggists, ex-convicts may choose to work towards removing the legal penalties that surround drug sales and use. Civil disobedience, demonstrations, strikes, picketing, the organizing of groups such as Native Indians, prisoners, and the

unemployed, tax resistance, and rent strikes are all illegal if they stray beyond the narrow strictures of the law, yet they are all within the repertoire of the Western tradition of political change.

The *HCC* selections encourage the students to confront their “now” critically. Canada is a typical Western blend of Capitalism and Technology. There are already laws here against most “subversive” activities and as the techniques of the “Friendly Fascism” develop, we will all be monitored, supervised, and directed with increasing efficiency. If these trends meet with no restraint or opposition, technocapitalism must inevitably lead to greater and greater totalitarian control over social relations. Prisoners are at the lowest rung; their present, in this sense, may be the outside citizen’s future.

Prison can be a revolutionary experience for those forced to go through it; when one is confronted directly with one’s obvious loss of freedom, one’s perceptions are invariably turned upside down. The standard university courses have intrinsic educational value as a method of supplying a context for our Western tradition; the *HCC*, however, is the first prison curriculum which directly confronts the prisoner-student with political choices — something that is studiously ignored in the mainstream educational process. The process of politicization can proceed quite quickly once the prisoner-student links his or her personal experiences in relation to the State, the class structure and its law with the history, literature, and political theory touched on in the *HCC*. I want every student who leaves our *HCC* class to be a political man. The degree to which they act upon their new consciousness is the true test of the material’s effectiveness.

Two Poems

the poetry of the future
must be written with an Uzi
truth must be the victor
'bullets are real' carlos
produce no commodity
art must be repugnant
to the oppressor
it must polarize
they should want either to kill you
or become you
sedition must be our ambition
neither buy nor sell
simply give and take
do not encourage them

genocide in Central America
born-again Generals
"scorched communists"
indigenous ideologies
drafted in life
not in Georgetown University
which poses the threat to reason?
the question need not even be asked
Jeane Kirkpatrick,
seeing (?) through eyes
which see only substantiation
for this or that dissertation
a fucking murderer
I see you in my dreams
giving John Paul II head

"traditional rhythms of work and leisure"
draft my life for me,
please miss Kirkpatrick
I am incapable
of seeing the subtleties
of the elusive Russians
you're mad as a fucking hatter

in Nicaragua
Nicaragua,
authenticity
in the theatre filled
with morons
with greasy popcorn in their laps
as they watch
a B-Grade movie

Gregory Worobets, William Head Prison

UNDER THE \$5.50 SOUTH PACIFIC PALMS

Because they had been bad boys once too often and arrogant too much and too heavy with bad karma and too stupid to know it, they were sent, naughty children, to a federal penitentiary, where evil temptations are rationed and all clocks frozen and there is plenty of time to meditate on past and future mistakes. There they could become new men, there with the killers on lifelong find-a-remorse trips, there with the hot blooded robbers and the cold blooded thieves and the dormant freaks and the restless pushers and the junkies in search of the perfect high, rejected children who have never been warned that they were born losers.

Now, three of them, Wizard, Genius and Bonehead, are sitting together in a ten by eight foot cell, the colour TV off, the stereo radio on, the rock music jamming the soft murmur of South Pacific waves caressing the golden sand at the feet of the green palms under the blue sky on the wall poster printed in Switzerland with the best colours that \$5.50 can buy.

But Wizard, Genius and Bonehead are ignoring the colours and sounds. They are busy uncoiling a roll of toilet paper. When its cardboard core tube is liberated and when a hole cut into the tube's end is fitted with a small colander made of perforated silver foil, a smart hashish pipe is ready.

Wizard carefully loads the silver colander with a few brown crumbs of hashish which looks like the dried excrement of mice. "Afghan. The best," he says, handling the pipe with the solemnity of a priest holding a chalice. He stretches his lips around one end of the tube (unfortunately, toilet paper cylinders, never designed for such a function, have a rather awkward diameter). Plugging the tube's free end with his left palm to control the draft, Wizard lights up the hashish, inhales deeply and, when his face turns red, gingerly passes the pipe to Genius. The sweet smell of burning hashish fills the cell. The dream hour comes.

"There is this small island with a bank full of the safety deposit boxes loaded with millions," Wizard starts his story, after sending the hashish pipe for the second round. "Cash, gold, jewelry, you

name it. Millions hidden from taxmen and lawmen. It will be easy to take out. There are just several cops on the island. No army. Three guys can do the job."

The eyes of Genius are sparkling but he has some doubts. "Come on! Must be pretty tight security around all those millions!"

Wizard, who has spent twenty years in the drug business and only ten of it in prison — which gives him, he thinks, the right to view himself as a very successful and smart individual — cannot tolerate anybody questioning his wisdom.

"Security my ass!" he bursts. "I am telling you there are only a few cops. The security is the sea around the island. Five hundred miles to the nearest land. If you try to escape with any loot, you are a sitting duck. But we can stash away the treasure somewhere on the island and wait till the heat is off."

"Good fuckin' music," observes Bonehead, noticing, after the final puff from the pipe, the quality of the stereo sounds coming from the radio.

"I prefer to have more firepower," Genius is still skeptical. "With more men we can take over the entire island, the airport, the radio station. We can hire some mercenaries from Latin America. Nicaraguan Contras maybe. They will be cheap. They need money and they have guns. Or maybe Nicaraguan Sandinistas will help." Genius is one of those cons who, searching for a meaning of life in prison, discovered politics as others discover religion. Now he is obsessed with revolutions, in particular those in Latin America. He wants to join the action when he gets out. He has only to decide on which side.

"I like the idea of taking over the island," Bonehead likes the idea of taking over the island, "but I won't have anything to do with those fascist pig Contras. Sandinistas are O.K." Bonehead is the most political animal of them all. He even has a political explanation for the gold ring in his left ear. He endures the recurring infection of the skin around the earring as a small sacrifice for an act of rebellion against the capitalist society. Every earring counts in the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. "We can take over the island and create an anarchist state. A sort of anarchist commune. The first true people's paradise under the palm trees. No taxes, no police, no prisons."

"Listen Bonehead," Wizard is starting to lose his cool, "you can stay there and organize your banana commune but I'll rather take my money and split. If you don't mind." He reloads the pipe with a new chunk of hashish.

"The anarchist state might be a good idea. Like a pirate republic. All criminals could hide there." Genius tries to combine his criminal pragmatism with political ambitions. "We'll give citizenship to eve-

rybody and have our own passports..."

"You can stick your passport up your ass!" interrupts Wizard. "I need your bogus passport like I need cancer. You can stay, both of you, on that island and practice your political masturbation till you see the U.S. Marines landing on the beach." Wizard takes another deep breath through the hashish pipe. "There is nothing more pathetic than common crooks turned revolutionaries," he snarls.

The pipe makes two more rounds in complete silence. They inhale deeply and hold their breath to extract maximum bliss.

"Say we do it alone, only three of us," Genius finally breaks the silence. "We'll have to divide the loot into three equal halves and hide each half separately."

"You can only have two halves," Wizard points out.

"Why only two halves," objects Bonehead, "if there are three of us?"

"Because a half is a half, dummy," explains Wizard. "You'll get your one-third, don't worry."

"Why not stash everything together and divide it later when we return to pick it up?" Unabashed, Bonehead keeps probing.

"Because I couldn't sleep knowing that you know where my treasure is," responds Genius.

"I wouldn't trust you either, prick," Wizard admits, smiling. "We'll collect our money a few months after the hit, even a year later, when the dust settles. I can wait a year for a truckload of cash. And it will be a life of leisure and pleasure on the deck of my own yacht ever after." He immerses himself in the sea of pleasant thoughts.

But Genius decides to spoil Wizard's fun. "Why do you want to rob the bank, Wizard, if you've already made, as you brag all the time, millions selling drugs?" he asks with a sly smile.

"I spent my money on coke and whores and enjoyed every minute of it," Wizard has the quick answer. He has been asked this question before.

Yet the magic mood is disturbed. The dreams drift away along with the hashish smoke. So when Bonehead suggests that it is time to switch the TV on and watch "Star Trek," Wizard explodes: "Fuck your 'Star Trek'! When are you going to grow up?!"

They watch "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" instead.

W.J. Kaplinowski, Matsqui Prison

Sweet Possession

It's not enough to feel the wind
 ghostly breath
 primal seducer of darkness,
Nor is it enough to see the moonlight
 silver shard
 silent conjuror of phantoms.
This living night, crouching
 with eyes burning bright,
This jade-green land, beckoning
 with dew-soaked hand
Is not like smooth stone
 to be possessed through simple senses.
Rather,
 capricious carnal dream,
 it is possessor.

Gerry Hannah, Matsqui Prison

DEATH OF HIPPIE

The Communication Company sponsored a Haight-Ashbury event they called "death of hippie," in the autumn of 1967. An effigy of a hippie, love beads, hash pipe and all, rode in a casket down Haight Street and found his bed of eternal sleep near the Stanyan Street entrance of Golden Gate Park. I noted the beginning of the event from a sidewalk, but since I maintained hippies did not exist, I was not a participant. Upwards of twenty five thousand of them in ten square blocks — but I claimed they did not exist.

I left for Canada that fall and did not return to California 'til the next year, the year King and Kennedy became frozen in that season of nightmare, the Sixties. I knew Nixon and his "secret plan" to end the war would be the people's choice in a couple of months when I came, and I came anyway and came to stay. I was not a quick study.

The Haight that I had known had vanished completely and in its place was a "youth culture" slum. I still knew a couple of people living in the district, but the action was elsewhere. And action was the thing everybody was interested in: by 1968 hippie was not only dead, he had been beatified and the relics were being merchandised — packaged to be pleasing for those twenty billion irresponsible dollars that Chet Helms spoke so lovingly of to Ms. Didion in her piece, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem." The brethren who had buried poor old hippie, got down to business, merchandising themselves to their younger brothers and sisters and even to their parents. We couldn't get much more American: we made a profit on our nostalgia for ourselves, all the time lamenting the disappearing "good old days." For some it seemed ignoble, so they kept as much as possible to the fringes, following the back roads of the times. I was one of those, but I kept on those roads only because the excitement and freedom of mid-decade were irresistible for me, knowing all the while that the paper would come due and I would be short of credit.

There were signs. The riot gun winking matte black in my face one early morning in 1969, while the Highway patrolman checked my ID on the Bay Bridge — that was one signal that should have been hard to ignore. The time my friend blew a hole in his foot with a Walther PPK (what was he doing with a gun, anyway?) and was so doped he

didn't have the sense to get medical attention — that should have been easy enough to read. The CN gas hovering over Berkeley for what seemed like months, the National Guard on every street corner in that same city — all these things came in the last months of what one writer (I suspect she was over 30) called a "slum of a decade," the Sixties. These were the signals that the indulgence was over, that hippies were going to have to come home from the Halloween party. If we did not, things were going to end badly, the ultimate American disaster. Yet to me, there was a vividness to those years that make them stand out and alone. Somehow the whole story got told then, and if it will never be that bad again, it will also never be that exciting. It took almost eleven years for me to get around to throwing the dirt on old hippie's coffin.

Greg transitted the dark regions of that era with me. He was one of the first of many people I would come to know who made trips to South America to smuggle cocaine. I guess he started about 1969, a bare wires operation, low slung and swift and an immediate success. No one else was doing it then, so his primitive methods worked well enough. He had thought it out and his "routing" was the key to success, he claimed: Lima to Tahiti; Tahiti to Canada; across the border to the States and San Francisco. Of course, Greg would make a lot of money and somehow spend it all in a few months. Having no money to finance his next trip, he would end up at the mercy of older — and more ruthless — men who had the money and were interested in a high return in a venture where a young fool risked his skin while they sat back and collected the fat. Greg was the kind of fool they were looking for and they wore a sleek look when they started working with him: they somehow knew it would work out. Twenty thousand dollars would get spent on wardrobes, passports, and airline tickets before anyone even left the country. The financiers would sit back, relax and watch Greg's debit grow, but they never worried: Greg had a track record, he was a performer. So no one worried — except Greg; every detail nipped and gnawed at him —and then the pressurecooker would bubble up some phantom problems for him. The years at the edge started to cut some lines that didn't come from the coke bag.

The first time things went really bad, Greg had been financed by an old bandito named Jamie. The women who were carrying the bulk of the load got nailed and Greg decided to "kamikaze" the remainder of the load himself. He had to, he figured, to get the money to bail out the women who had been arrested. Jamie waited for Greg and the load with a shotgun and a couple of big, nasty and hungry creatures. That's the way Greg told the story to me when he came asking for help. As I knew the women who were in trouble and was incensed

that Jamie didn't seem properly concerned with their welfare, I got involved to the point of helping Greg get the load back and then explaining to Jamie that he would get his money as soon as the women were out of danger. Fortunately, things worked out without anyone getting shot or staying overlong in some Latin dugeon. But it began to dawn on me about then that the sixties were over and that whatever we were, we were not the flower children we once were.

While that should have clarified certain things, it didn't. We remembered the almost innocent days and made the present worse and worse. Greg's business took on a pattern of rich pastures of promise turned to mud in a torrent of compromise and expediency. So did mine for that matter, but it rained slower on my fields and a couple of bountiful and untroubled harvests came in, before I noticed that all the topsoil had washed away. I didn't really know it for a moral certainty 'til we buried Greg.

We didn't really bury Greg. His mother in Virginia did that. We threw him into a ravine near his house in Santa Cruz. I say we, but my participation was only figurative: the truth is Rob called me one morning in the spring of 1978 and said, "Greg's O.D.ed. What should I do?" Rob had been a business acquaintance, introduced to me in the late sixties by Greg. To be entirely accurate, he was more of a rival in the highly competitive pot business: Greg was one of the customers we vied for and since none of the customers Rob and I had in common were pivotal to our respective businesses, the rivalry remained friendly. Rob was a curious mixture of insecurity and arrogance from a patrician Bucks' county, Pennsylvania family as he told anyone he had known for more than ten minutes and some he had known less. At least he didn't drool in fancy restaurants or steal your dope or money out of your coat pocket as soon as you turned your head. That was getting to be a great virtue by 1978. That spring Rob and I had formed a tentative partnership; I had loaned him my car for the night before he called to tell me about Greg.

"Have you tried walking him around or shooting him up with coke?" I asked. We always figured it was safe to talk about the drugs we consumed on the phone. The listeners were only interested in the drugs we sold. Ah, California. Ah, the bad old days.

Rob strangled and gurgled. "He's dead."

"Come on over and we'll figure it out." Rob was only five minutes away when he called me. I waited.

The last time I had seen Greg he was about to begin a six month sentence in the San Francisco county jail and had spent the month prior to the sentence living with me, much to the dismay of the woman I was living with. He had just enough cocaine left from his last trip to Peru to manage to keep us both awake for what seemed

like weeks, worrying about his impending sojourn in that notorious madhouse of a jail. Finally, unable to assuage his misgivings about his coming trip to that penitentiary purgatory, I went upstairs to bed, advising Greg to do the same, and collapsed into a seizure of dreamless sleep. When I came back downstairs some six hours later, I found Greg swaying in my living room, a baggie with an ounce of high grade cocaine spilling out of its mouth on the coffee table, and two tequila bottles and a bag of assorted pills surrounding the bag of cocaine. Every fifteen seconds or so, Greg would duck his head suddenly, while batting the air with convulsive swings of his arms; then he would bring his head back up cautiously, one swollen eye squeezed shut as if trying to sight a rifle and say, "Did you see that?" I shortly gave up trying to persuade Greg that the giant insects that he claimed were dive bombing him were illusory and resorted instead to the more practical expedient in the bag of pills, swallowed with sips of tequila. An hour and a half later, Greg was calm enough to consider sleep.

I had seen Greg's flirtations with madness and death grow more ardent over the course of those drug fueled years. The scene in my living room was not one more picaresque, dope-addled tale from the aftermath of the Sixties, not to me anyway. It was something that made me realize how much we needed to close the covers of that book and how I looked forward to a sober day when I could laugh about the incident with Greg. And now Greg had consummated his passion and the sober days wouldn't come. So much for something that approaches a happy ending.

Rob and I were probably the only close friends Greg had left from a decade before. He had abused the others or they had abused him to the point that Greg could only circulate between my house and Rob's, lamenting his isolation and telling us what sterling men we were because we had never betrayed him — or given him the opportunity to betray us. To be fair to his memory, I recall him having a lot less betrayal in him than most. He had just grown numbingly mad, self-destructive and tiresome. Every six months or year, he went down to Peru, came back and lost his money and a few more of his remaining friends and then on the edge of despair, he would do something so crazy in public that the normally tolerant police in one of the San Francisco area communities would be obliged to throw him in jail. There he would dry out, gain weight if not his health, and re-emerge two or three months later, broke and determined to get back to Peru to get enough money to do it all over again. It happened the same way with minor variations a half a dozen times over a five or six year period and there is no denying what a sad spectacle it was. Although I pointed out the hazards of the pattern, I always joined him for a party when he got back from Peru. At this point, when I

think about Greg, I am always searching for a way to complete the sentence, "What I should have done..." What I inevitably did do was waltz to the edge with him almost every time he did and almost join him two and a half years after he had danced up to it for the last time.

What I did that morning Rob called was to imagine that a little creative thought would bring Greg back, do the Lazarus number for him. Rob knew better. I didn't see him for a day and a half: he had stuffed Greg's body into the trunk of my car and driven a hundred and twenty miles to a gully near Greg's old house in Santa Cruz. Though Greg lived with me or Rob at that time, he had lived in the redwood forests of Santa Cruz for years and loved it. His various debacles had made him unwelcome in the community, however, and his ghost was the only part of him that briefly called the redwoods of Santa Cruz home once more. Rob threw Greg's body into a ravine. There he rested, until two weeks later, when Rob went to the police and told them where to find Greg. They had threatened to charge him with illegal disposal of a body if he didn't.

The terrifying truth is that if Greg had died in 1968, I would have found a way to make a profit on his death. He gave us both grace by waiting a decade: by then I had lost my youthful resilience and actually recognized his passing. The cynicism I wheeled so cheerfully through the late sixties and the seventies turned to a bent axle of despair. A decade late, I said my personal last rites for hippie.

Joe Gideon

Something Is Caught in My Throat

Something is caught in my throat;
a hair-ball of embarrassment.
Coughing and hacking to dislodge it,
my face turns Vishnu pink.
But I had to lick and lick,
preening my body,
(my body, as it would be seen
reflected in a mirror)
to get it in my craw.
It was long accumulated, and I enjoyed
the sensuality of its accumulation

I have this concoction I drink
to disentangle the tangled hairs.
It doesn't taste good; medicinal;
but I'm told it works.
Anyway, it tastes old, like aged whiskey.
It burns away layers of my inside tissue,
as it gets at the obscure knot
in my aesophagus.
The doctor who prescribed this stuff
is our family doctor. I've never met him;
he gave the remedy to my mother to dispense.

Gregory Worobets, William Head Prison

THE ENDLESS SUMMER AT THE LIFERS' SOCIAL

It is late July in the verdant Fraser Valley. The Lifers' Group at Matsqui Medium Prison has staged a social out in the Private Family Visiting compound. The remark common to everybody's lips is how beautiful the weather is behaving.

Beyond the main cell block, out in a discreet corner of the prison is a small triangle of suburban tract homes. These are the houses where some prisoners and their families can relate intimately. The lawns are green, geometrical, well-tended; lines of asters and marigolds demark the narrow walkways to the front doors. The view through the living room windows is a picture postcard panorama of green parkland and beautiful Mount Baker in the distance. There is plenty of room too. It is a sunny perfect day and if one ignores the double chainlink fence topped with the glittering swirls of concertina wire, the prowling truck lurking beyond it, and concentrates on the normality of the two styles of home — shortened mock-tudor matchbox and compact alpine chalet — it appears a comfortable suburban existence indeed.

Sunday afternoon barbecue in the backyard. T-Bone steak — “a really big one apiece.” A stand-up lifer asks prisoner and guard alike, “How would you like your steak done?” pencil and notepad in hand, a solicitous waiter. The smell of charring flesh is in the shimmering summer air. The tidy kitchens and dining rooms are awash in food: ice cubes and watermelon slices, cantalopes and orange peaches, picked when they were green, still hard and resisting, a field of cherries surrounding walls of exquisite looking german style cream pastry cake, made of layer upon layer of white and brown cremes, and squirted out of pre-prepared cans, looking moist and scrumptious yet dry sugary sponge to bite into. Racks and racks of these pastries and appetites adrift in a sea of shaving can frosting. An enormous cake, a little house and hammer in white chocolate tacked on to it, a dedication beside: “Bob's Construction Crew.” The Lifers outdid themselves putting together this spread. An extravagance of sweetness, the horn of gratitude run amok. It is an extra-special Sunday afternoon barbecue, the appreciation measurable in the waves of sugar, margarine and refined white flour that went into it. More is best.

And they have most time. The prisoners here are lifers all: 10, 15, 20, 25 year minimum sentences before the possibility of parole, lifetime parole thereafter. They are permanently owned by Corrections Canada and the Parole Service. The key catchphrase can go either way: You "lose credibility" or you "gain credibility" as the Warden often describes it when he explains the process to inmates. These lifers intend to "gain credibility." They built the tract homes themselves, whereas in other prisons, government contractors put up the houses. Perhaps credibility had not been explained to the prisoners in those other places properly. This party is a celebration of the completion of miniature alpine chalet number three. The lifers have killed people, sold dope and shot cops, but that was a long time and many tract homes ago. Here they sit at the party in the \$700 love seat and matching flower print sofa, watching the Channel Seven Sunday Matinee movie on the 26" color TV set that they purchased for these houses through the profits they earned selling the other prisoners ice cream, protein powder and skin magazines.

And it is a family gathering. The children of the guards are herded to the expansive bathrooms, (each much larger than a prisoner's cell) by their watchful parents who plant themselves between the hallway and the lifers watching TV from the sofas. The prison officers directing "social and cultural development," mostly women, have fresh faced kids, some so young that they stumble on the carpets; apparently their menfolk are not so enthusiastic about this particular social gathering. There is something incongruous about seeing a prison officer who has signed the statement of intention, "I will shoot to kill," as part of their pre-employment package, tossing her tiny child up onto her hip, leading her son by his little hand to the toilet; but this incongruity is at the heart of modern corrections. An old guard, now in civilian clothes, tells a prisoner that he loves the honeydew melons. The watermelons are "marvellous" too. Such a good time everyone is having. Inmates saw the necks of long thick prison-made baguettes, with real knives. A sense of trust has developed perhaps. The place reeks with shared responsibility. A squat pirate of a lifer is laughing with a young chinless criminology student who intends a "correctional career." He is telling her, "We're great, we know it, and you're great and someone else will come along and they'll be greater. That's the way it is." This man might be paroled in 2005 A.D. She smoothes her pink dress and glances about, a touch skittish at his frankness.

A lifer staggers towards the grill. He collides with a fence. He wanted to make a good impression so he didn't bring his wheelchair. He has terminal MS: the prison doctors foretold his imminent death three years before. He throws his limbs out and lurches out of sight. A thick greasy smoke pours back over the fence into the shaded

corner where guests, family, lifers and prison staff interact. Steaks are obligatory at these feeds and these T-Bones are burning nicely.

Mothers and fathers come and visit their sons. An old tanned man, topped with a red vodka cap, sees a young girl glance at him and not glance quickly away. He comes up, "I used to sell the stuff but now I'm done, retired this last year. But I drive hearse for a mortuary, part-time. Back up and watch. I don't unload the coffins. They incinerate them now. How about that!" His eyes are opaque behind prescription sun glasses. He is a lifer's old dad.

A Social-Development officer has brought his wife. He stations her in house no. 2 at the hallway junction to the bedrooms — the floor plans are standard — and they watch for wandering amorous couples. Duty and Pleasure. The penalty for contravening the Matsqui standing orders on proper visiting conduct can be a permanent ban on visitors. Visiting is a privilege; credibility is taken into account. The officer and his wife are on their summer vacation. He tells a curious visitor that "we don't like to travel too far from home on our holidays."

T-Bones for the adults, wieners and hot dogs for the kids. A severe little boy marches in, wrapped in knee shorts and a tightly buttoned white shirt. He is plump and looking for food. His father follows, identically dressed. The table in front of him is painted with two colours of Kraft cheese and sliced baguettes. "Are you looking for the bread or the cheese, son?" "The cheese," his boy replies. "Well son, it is right in front of you." The cloying smell of familial intimacy is strong at that moment. The father is a Christian M-2 sponsor of a lifer; the goal of the M-2 program is the development of positive community resources for the ex-offender, not quite missionary work but close to grace nonetheless.

Little children overrun their mothers. They wander between the TV set and the visitless lifers. The prison officer mothers scurry in to remove them. The lifers, deep in the living room chairs, have been there so long that they don't pass comment. They are waiting. Nobody speaks much; nobody listens when they do. The outside prowl truck creeps parallel to the fences through the dust. The lifers stare at the colourful TV screen. A girl bursts in, smiling and freckled. "Who won the ballgame?" she asks to the room. No one responds. No one knows who she belongs to. Potato salad, wieners, cold plates, the fridges disgorge even more food. Ashtrays are edged off the tables, covering tin foil falls on the floor and is tangled underfoot.

Count time! The mood becomes anxious: this duty must be performed correctly. The lifers are corralled off and counted, each officer in place in a semi-circle doing their own tally. The visitors look

on blankly from the shadows. A delay. The MS lifer and the paraplegic lifer did not respond to the call so the count has to be taken again. Twenty-three lifers present. The high sun is hot, austere. The main cell block looms over the four foot woodslat back fence and the little blunt heart of the prison is a hive of identical cells, a swarm of frozen activity. The count does not clear until the teams of guards have peered through each of the 312 window slats in the slab metal doors and seen flesh and movement.

"The count is correct." The atmosphere relaxes. The social-cultural development officers make special efforts to smile and be courteous to the elderly outside visitors who perhaps do not quite understand. When lifers and staff pass, their expressions are neutral. Each side knows too much. But this undercurrent does nothing to deter the forward progress of this party: when the steaks are finally done and served it is smiles all around, little puffs of relief that it all went so well, and hearty platework at the provident largesse.

There were no "incidents," no outward howl or tear at the tissue, not even anything untoward as is apt to happen with children present. The lifers cleaned up afterwards and the Social-Development officers wrote up their individual activity reports, nodding in judgement about which particular lifers deserved excellent performance notices, which should be encouraged with a positive word or two. The Sisyphian climb to gain "credibility" continues.

John Abbott, Matsqui Prison

THE SHU ON THE OTHER FOOT: H M SPECIAL UNIT BARLINNIE

Imagine. An eight man jail for prisoners likely to be detained for very long periods or with propensities to violence towards staff. Picture eighteen staff, working in shifts, the majority of whom are discipline staff, plus a governor (warden) whose sole duty is to the special unit. Nothing difficult so far. An image of any special unit, a super max perhaps, springs to mind. Now mix in visiting hours of approximately eight hours per weekday and five hours per weekend. That seems rather liberal! But who would want to visit for eight hours through plexiglass and via phone? Imagine, however, that in the first three months of one's stay in such a unit that visits may take place in the prisoner's cell! (And this may be a very long program. From 1972 to 1982 only twenty-one prisoners had been admitted to the unit). Who would want to spend eight hours in some Spartan drum, asks the skeptic? Who needs to? Each cell is individually decorated (as is each prisoner, who may wear what he wants) and includes, typically, rugs, wall coverings, curtains, TV sets, radios, armchairs, wall units and even a small refrigerator. And who brings some of these items to the incarcerated, isolated as they are from downtown Glasgow? Why their visitors, of course. And how do they get in? Why the on-site staff approve a list submitted by the prisoner, a process overseen by the community as a whole. Cell doors, thankfully, may not be closed during the visit, thus rescuing Scotland's puritan traditions and sparing foreign guests needless moral horror.

Critics of penology can only applaud such experiments, and will be gratified by the fact that from 1971 to 1984 there has been but one serious incident in the unit. But, they will say, the paternalistic keepers exercise final control. Everyone 'knows' this, and not wanting to compromise a good thing, cooperate. Besides, it is probably riddled with 'head-games' and other forms of manipulated response. The critic leans back. His assessment: progressive, but not falling outside the traditional patterns of authority typical of the 'carceral'. Use-value? Limited.

Indeed, the original unit was envisaged as therapeutic. A substantial number of staff were to have nursing experience and, according to the 1971 recommendations, "the traditional officer/inmate rela-

tionship should be modified to approximate more closely to a therapist/patient basis...". But the average mad dog, it appears, restored to his individuality and a modicum of humanity, reacts in a rather rational manner. The original plan thus fell by the wayside. But a democratic community survived these changes. The community (staff, prisoner, and governor, plus outside specialists like the art therapist) meet as a community. They vote on issues of concern—which include any aspect of community life. Internal matters are subject to the democratic control of the community. But if the community seeks certain fundamental changes, such as a release program, they *instruct* the governor to carry their wishes to higher authority. Clearly the governor's authority is unquestioned, and remains identical to that of any prison warden, but his relationship to the community is not ordinary. All staff and prisoners are on a first name basis, including the governor. Personal problems of staff or prisoner may be dealt with by the group, if the individual concerned is willing, but its primary role is political. Unlike other radical democratic experiments in prison, for instance at Niantic, this one seems fated to last. But how? This is unprecedented.

The community at Barlinnie has internalized its own history and the intent of democratic structures sufficiently to make this possible. The level of mutual concern on behalf of both parties is striking to the visitor from another planet. If I may inject a personal note, having been accused of role conflict myself, it was shocking to see the entire apparatus of prison roles dissolving before my eyes. Both staff and prisoners shared that sense of shock, even though several of them had been in the unit for considerable time. In one of the prisons I have worked in, a play by Harold Pinter, which was to be performed by prisoners, was put on the Index because "some administrative staff might be offended." It was apparently recommended that the prisoners indulge in "light entertainment" rather than controversial themes. Visions of *Happy Days Doing Porridge* still dance through my consciousness at unguarded moments, but I will not forget the mural prisoners at Barlinnie had painted right round their "living" unit. It featured grotesque capitalists spewing, from various orifices, the raw material of contemporary life into the world. Workers, their families, ordinary people, could be seen indulging in ordinary things, only to be caught up in some assembly line that drew the blind into the digestive system of that same monstrous appetite that had released it. This was not suburban fantasy, this was free imagery. Imagine.

Barlinnie's history and democratic structure, however, cannot entirely explain its continued existence into the "new reality" of the eighties. In 1982 the Inspector's Report on Barlinnie noted that "with some justification the Unit has come to be accepted as a safety-valve

for the prison system as a whole." Since only limited use of it has been made (remember, 21 prisoners in 10 years) doubts must be raised "about the need for a larger unit or other units of this kind." So there it is. Barlinnie will exist forever more in pristine isolation. No lessons are to be drawn from its success. No desire to integrate into the system at large the qualities of trust, de-institutionalization, and democracy is evident in the report or any other official document. Without the publicity brought to the Unit by Jimmy Boyle's testimony, it would have successfully by-passed mainstream discussion about the purpose and function of prison. The 1982 report is clearly delighted that the media attention paid to the Unit from 1973 to 1977 had disappeared, allowing it "to develop quietly and without publicity." But if the Secretary of State for Scotland is not eager to promote the Barlinnie model, if we may so ennoble it, this is not the sole reason for the silence surrounding its existence.

On a tour of British prisons (as yet there is no package deal but travel agents are doubtless on the trail), we were struck by the agnostic attitude adopted by individuals in the field. The Unit was perceived as interesting but too expensive to be practical. Lacking figures, it nevertheless appeared that the costs were due to the excess of staff. Originally the Unit was to accomodate 20 prisoners with at least four officers on duty at all times. Excluding the governor, this meant a ratio of approximately one to one. the actual ratio is almost 2.5 staff to one. Four staff are on duty during the greater part of the day while only two are required in the evening (the only time when prisoners are confined to the living unit area). Our impression was that the Unit was quite likely able to function without such massive staffing. After all, what do people do there? Prisoners garden, keep pigeons, repair motorbikes, sculpt, work in ceramics and other artistic media, play pool, prepare their own meals when the mood strikes, and entertain guests and foreign tourists. Staff watch prisoners do this and facilitate it. This is not a criticism of staff, who appeared to enjoy their work and were good at it, but rather a sense that the true radicalism of Barlinnie lies in the rediscovery of self-management in the least likely of places. Probably the interaction of staff and prisoner is the most consistent subject of democratic concern for the whole community. Why not replace that focus with programs, particularly educational programs? The Unit, as it exists, perhaps has no need of this. But if Barlinnie is to ever share its progress with prisoners as a whole, and thus with the larger community, it must become a practical experience for all prisoners. As it stands it remains a safety valve for the system and saves the lives of a few men from a downbound train. The prison will not be abolished by fiat; it must first enter into a period of radical reform impelled by the needs of imprisoned men. Then the fate of the prison may be admitted to the agenda.

Wayne Knights

REVIEWS

Jimmy Boyle. *A Sense of Freedom*. London: Pan Books, 1977, pp. 264

A Sense of Freedom is, on the surface, a very simple book. It conforms to a socio-literary pattern that is well established in the history of prison exposés: a colourful and detailed description of the hero's birth into a disadvantaged class (the working class of the Gorbals district of Glasgow); the "drift" into a series of youthful picaresque exploits which lead to a prominent role in organized crime (Boyle became the leader of one of the most powerful money-lending gangs in Glasgow); short bouts of incarceration that culminate in the protagonist being convicted of a major crime (Boyle is "fitted up" on a murder charge); and, finally, a deadly confrontation between "us" and "them" inside the microscopic walls of the prison sub-culture is followed by an almost "miraculous" conversion, whereby "Scotland's Most Violent Man" sees the light, discovers his talents as a sculptor and a writer, and gains his "sense of freedom." The "rebirth" is attributed to his entry into the Special Unit at Barlinnie Prison, a utopian, model community in which long term violent offenders are treated humanely and granted special privileges. All of this occurs, however, in a context strangely devoid of political dimensions, thereby rendering any "sense of freedom" highly problematical.

In the "Introduction and Dedication" Boyle states his belief that he has made "a positive contribution to a better understanding of the problem" of criminal behaviour for "the pattern of my own life in crime is analogous to the vast majority involved in it." Unanswered questions begin to proliferate. Whilst the book is declared a genuine attempt to warn young people that there is nothing glamorous about getting involved in crime and violence, the story we get makes it clear that Boyle was drawn to crime in search for adventure and publicity, and that it did indeed supply some sort of ego gratification. And what is more "glamorous" — in this narrow sense — than the role of artist, an irony which escapes Boyle throughout his book (on the last page he is still worried that "in the field of human contact there are too many professional status seekers and not enough patients"). The medical model is here confusingly identified with a moral perspective

on "the problem." Nor has he answered the question why he "went wrong" while other members of his family and class did not choose this path. The melodramatic "my life sentence had actually started the day I left my mother's womb" (p. 35) is then only a rhetorical flourish. Even more confusing is the assertion that his book is "an indictment of the whole of society, and I have no hesitation in placing myself amongst that number." On the contrary, *A Sense of Freedom* is, however inadvertently, an endorsement of society's values and status quo, for it never attains political understanding of the problem, opting instead for a moralizing gloss, interspersed with a romanticized view of the self versus the system.

Jimmy Boyle offers an apolitical structuralist view of society in which everyone's role is identified by its opposition to, or interrelationship with, another set of roles, and not by reference to a set of moral standards outside the system, as his introduction would suggest. For example, Boyle never questions the moral justification of money-lending: it was sanctioned by tradition and mirrored, moreover, the practices of bourgeois society. To resolve the dilemma posed by "I don't really know who I am" (p. 11), Boyle is, unfortunately, often led away from the sociological to the psychological: a newly found ability for introspection (abetted by yoga techniques) enabled him to "journey into his soul" and to discover the "real me" (p. 191). This rather ethereal romanticism follows a more debased version which was prominent in his brutal war against the prison system, during which, "bloody but unbowed," so to speak, he "endures" and asserts his ego against them. But even here it is clear that "image" or role-playing is more important than the rightness and wrongness of the positions held by the combatants. There are two particularly important examples of Boyle's awareness that one's assigned role in the "system" is actually the determining factor in establishing an identity. Harold Wilson, the ex-cop who lands in prison and is persecuted by both the screws and the cons, is defended by Boyle, who clearly sees that Wilson perforce is now on his side of the stage. On the other hand, the villainous Poof, who terrorizes other prisoners, is opposed by Boyle because he is stupidly doing the screws' job for them. Wilson is the real prisoner.

Boyle's own "conversion" involves a change in roles rather than a fundamental change in "character" in an ethical sense. A simple transposition occurs. A striking example of this is the pun which links one of his rebellious acts in Borstal that led the other boys "to put me on a pedestal" (p. 93) with his art therapy in the Special Unit which allowed Boyle the sculptor to put his projections of rebellion quite literally on a pedestal. The "art of violence" (p. 116) is thereby transmuted into a socially acceptable form.

This is all very nice, and, to the liberal-minded, probably even heartwarming. But what does it all tell us in terms of “a positive contribution to a better understanding of the problem”? Not a great deal. The Special Unit at Barlinnie was indeed a highly innovative change in the Scottish Prison System. To put it forward as the “model for the penal system of the future” (p. 249) is not, however, really addressing the problem. For one thing, this “utopia” is truly a nowhere, situated ambiguously between the traditional prison setting and the outside world. Treating prisoners as human beings in order that they may see the option of changing roles should not be simple-mindedly scoffed at, as it was by many officials in the Prison Service. Still, without a critical consciousness that takes into account the political realities of the outside world (a process that would have been helped along by a series of on-site educational offerings at “A” level and university level), there is something strangely static about this model community. Bourgeois etiquette has replaced the violent, primitive rituals of us and them. Insight into the premises upon which the social system is based does not, however, appear to have occurred. In fact, it could be argued that the “old” system rather than the Special Unit was, ironically enough, responsible for Boyle’s conversion. One could imagine a conservative penologist putting forth the suggestion that Boyle “burned out” his role as the most violent man, and was now ready, thanks to the old-fashioned prison discipline, to consider a new social role which the Special Unit offered. Boyle’s role as artist is certainly not “analogous” to the “vast majority” involved in criminal behaviour. We need less propaganda and more detailed documentation on how the Special Unit environment affected other violent offenders.

Although *A Sense of Freedom* aims to make a positive contribution, we end up with only a series of guarded negatives. This is most obviously apparent in the uses of the title phrase itself: the first “sense of freedom” occurs when Boyle leaves school at fifteen — “it was like leaving prison” (p. 62); the second “new sense of freedom” occurs when he received his life sentence and then decides, “I will now live by my laws” (p. 157); the final “glorious sense of freedom” (p. 189) is the most negative of all, for it occurs when he and some of his friends have barricaded themselves in during a disturbance at Inverness Prison. Most readers will remember the very convincing and often moving portrayals of Boyle’s childhood and early manhood in the Gorbals, narrative sequences reminiscent of the gritty realism of the early films of Scottish director John MacKenzie. Perhaps someday Jimmy Boyle will be able to deal with the larger political contexts in his own version of *The Long Good Friday*.

Peter Murphy

Jimmy Boyle. *The Pain of Confinement: Prison Diaries*. Canongate, 1984 (£9.95)

This diary has two subjects: one is its author, Jimmy Boyle, a former prisoner — now a sculptor and a community worker on drug, mental health and related problems; the other is the Special Unit, the “lily in the turnip patch” of the Scottish penal estate.

The title has more depth to it than first appears. It can be best explained through the text accompanying the picture on p. 150:

The real struggle in life is in developing oneself, each step is filled with pain and joy ... My view when undergoing pain is to tell myself “this pain is life”.

The result is that the author, although at times on the brink of despair and suicide, recognises in more reflective moments that “even though I am in prison, these are the finest years I’ve ever known” (p. 86). He sees that freedom is not merely physical, and that in sculpture he has discovered a creative freedom that few outside have experienced (203).

This is in the Special Unit: later, back in the mainstream at Edinburgh Prison, he finds he has to choose consciously to maintain “the continual pain of culture shock” (272) rather than become absorbed by a system which is habit-forming because it takes decision-making away from him. So the pain in the title is part of the process of growing awareness, not simply the pain of deprivation of liberty, and certainly not the pangs of remorse (Boyle tells us — in a remarkably casual aside — that he did not commit the murder of which he was convicted). In *The House of the Dead*, which is based on his own experience in prison in Siberia from 1849 to 1853, Dostoyevsky, in explaining the fact that he never met any prisoner who felt regret or moral suffering, says “the criminal who has revolted against society hates it, and considers himself in the right; society was wrong, not he.”

Boyle sees himself as the victim of his early environment in the Gorbals (a slum district of Glasgow — now largely rebuilt), which was impoverished both economically and emotionally in that, he says, important parts of his personality were denied expression (148). People from his background have no expectations from any legitimate career (104) and “our kids grow up to fill penal institutions” (231). He sees prisoners as being innocent compared with prison officers, psychiatrists, etc. (173). But these innocents feel victimised, so they retaliate: one prisoner chillingly explains to the author how he followed a prison officer round a gallery thinking how he might murder him — the ‘screw’ was randomly selected: any one

would have done. Boyle likewise has not quite freed himself from the cowboy and indian fantasy that he describes himself as living as a child: the difference is that he has now learnt to see the Apaches as the good guys. As Boyle puts it, he has not changed so much as to become aware of "the games they play and the traps they lay for fodder such as me and those poor souls who cry at seeing the Queen" (151).

This is not to say that the author's position cannot lead to insights when he does pause to analyse; for example:

Society allows people to live in sub-standard conditions. In doing so they have to live by a different set of values from the more affluent sections. But, when kids like George get caught up in gangs and someone dies as in George's case then the full weight of the authorities falls on him. The same authorities turn a blind eye to all the equally horrific problems of his lifestyle which are not labelled 'criminal' (322).

This perhaps explains the direction of Boyle's current activities. It also illustrates the difficulties faced by the prison system, which has to assume, for a time at least, total responsibility for a person whom society has, generally, failed in several different ways. It does not take on a simple 'criminal' problem with each individual prisoner, but a knot of social, economic and psychological problems and it seems implausible that anything that can be done in a prison might disentangle these. Boyle however is a long way from appreciating the difficulties of the prison system: and he says of the Special Unit, "my revenge against the system will be in making this place a success" (52). This is a far-sighted remark to have made in 1975. In this diary he cuts ground away from the case against the development of the Unit concept by saying that it works best with fewer staff (84). However it may be damaging — though it is scarcely surprising — that Boyle emerges from his diary as the lynch-pin of the Unit, having learnt his mission (in a scene which resembles that between Yoda and Luke Skywalker in *Return of the Jedi*) from the founding father of the Unit, Alex Stephen, then an administrator at the Scottish Prisons HQ. Boyle helps new prisoners settle in (196), prevents assaults on staff (9); the Secretary to the Parole Board seeks his advice on a leaflet (23), staff bring their annual reports to discuss with him (220), and he is called in to pronounce another inmate dead (167). Boyle appears to be running the place; and, according to the visiting psychiatrist, he runs it well: but he does not seem to acknowledge that the community of the Unit is doing anything for him.

From this diary, the success of the Unit would seem to be that, in giving prisoners responsibility it makes them act more responsibly: they develop an interest in their community and are willing to make

short-term sacrifices (e.g. repressing a violent reaction) in order to maintain their position in it. This is probably exactly why the majority of people outside do not get into trouble. When trouble does arise in the Unit, it is dealt with by discussion and negotiation. It is absorbed by the community, even to the extent that they wish to retain a prisoner when he stabs a fellow inmate. Boyle's view is that "punishment as practised in the normal penal system is counter-productive and can only make matters worse" (11). This may be because most people who land up serving a prison sentence have been punished in every other conceivable way since adolescence: they are habituated to punishment and have developed a kind of immunity to it.

The Scottish prison service has learnt some lessons from the Unit: though Boyle perhaps goes too far in seeing C Hall at Peterhead as modelled on lines similar to the Unit and Dungavel as "a larger model of the Special Unit standing on its own". But in the world of prisons the buildings themselves stand as monuments to the slowness of the processes of change. Boyle suggests that those who work within such a system can only achieve a sense of power by upholding the *status quo* (104): in other words, it is difficult to admit to the faults that you are responsible for rectifying, if you can see no likelihood of rectifying them.

This book is a disappointment after Boyle's first book, *A Sense of Freedom* (1977), and cannot bear comparison at all with the significant literature of prison experience — by, for example, Victor Serge. This disjointed (heavily edited?) diary form does not help but the main trouble is that the author appears more interested in the minutiae of his everyday life, in what X said to him about Z, than in analysis — even self-analysis. Unlike the great diarists (such as Boswell and Kafka) Boyle is unwilling to discuss his own failings. He also has more talent with stone than with words: it is typical that he seems to overlook completely a memorable phrase from a governor, which he quotes indirectly, about "red lights ringing in his ears" (elsewhere in the book it is the prisoners who take the drugs). Some poverty of literary imagination is evident in the conventional ending where girl meets Boyle and both exit into a sunset. Boyle's candour is also open to question: on p. 32 he admits the prisoners in the Unit have an occasional drink, whilst on p. 193 he tells an official he has never heard of drink being in the Unit. The latter may be a deliberate lie; but if so, it is normally expected that a writer would be frank enough to admit this in his diary.

However, for some unknown reason, few prisoners recount their experiences, and every contribution to this literature should be welcomed. Boyle is very critical of the prison system — not always fairly

so — but he is at least playing his part in keeping the prison system on the political agenda, which is the only way it can make progress in any way at all.

The publishers think that this book should be indexed under "Rehabilitation of Criminals". This begs an important question. What the book really shows is how one prisoner found legitimate ways of expressing his conflicts with society. This may be just as good as rehabilitation. However this book, for the first time, reveals that the author's new life is not free of offences: the difference is that now, like most middle-class citizens, he gets away with them. Boyle confesses that he went to see one of Henry Moore's sculptures in the Botanic Gardens and ended up, in an access of enthusiasm for the work of a fellow sculptor, "putting the upper part of my body inside it". This is forbidden under para 3(7) of the Royal Botanic Garden and Arboretum, Edinburgh, Regulations 1970: but no-one seems to have noticed.

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